

*The
Franciscans
Came
First*

Fanchón Royer

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- 1 Ancient Tenochtitlán — Zumárraga's see city. 2 Location of Gante's life. 4 Scene of Pedro de Betancourt's labors. 5 Home of the Boy Mar hospital community. 8 Serra's first New-World mission. 9 [Inset map:

Mississippi River

Gulf of Mexico



YUCATÁN

Merida

Campeche

CAMPECHE

TABASCO

BELIZE

CHIAPAS

PETÉN

VERA PAZ

San Cristobal

GUATEMALA

HONDURAS

Guatemala City

SALVADOR

Santiago de los Caballeros (Antigua)

NICARAGUA

Caribbean Sea

San Jose

Cartago

Talamanca Mts.

PANAMA

ALTA CALIFORNIA

San Francisco de Asís

Santa Clara de Asís

Monterey

San Carlos del Rio Carmel

San Antonio de Padua

San Luís Obispo

San Buenaventura

San Gabriel Arcangel

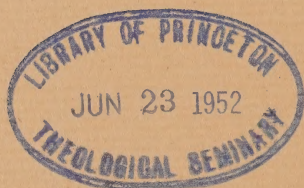
San Juan Capistrano

San Diego

MÉXICO

Pacific Ocean

[3] City founded by Motolinía — Scene of Blessed Sebastián's religious scene of martyrdom of the Boy Martyrs. [7] Quiroga's (second) Santa Fé departure of expeditions into Alta California. [10] Serra's home mission.



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The Franciscans Came First

By
FANCHÓN ROYER

1951

Paterson, N. J., St. Anthony Guild Press

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Imprimatur:
† Thomas A. Boland
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March 26, 1951

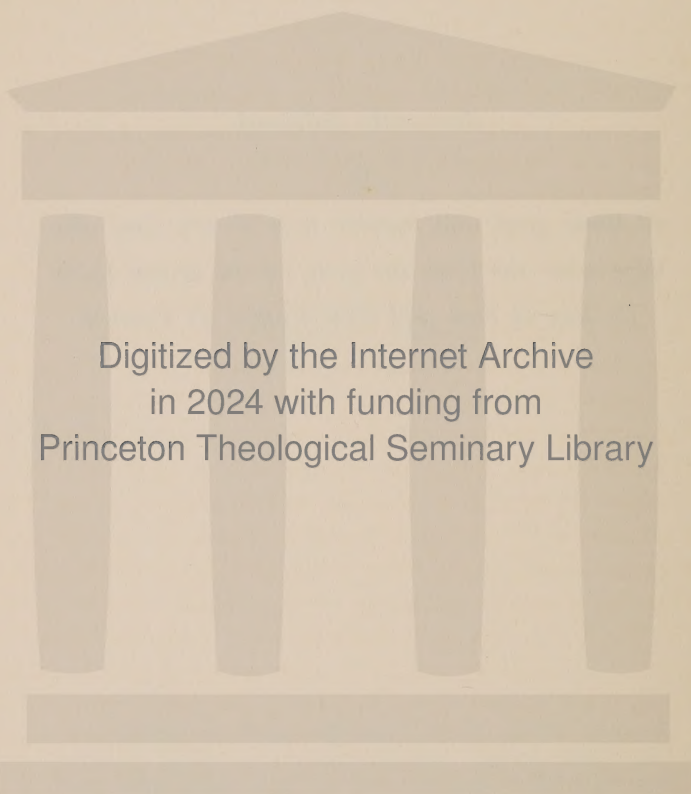
Dialogue has been introduced by the author where it seems to lighten and clarify the text. Except where contrary information is given, this dialogue — although suggested by relevant source material — is imaginary.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Reverently dedicated

to

*all those good and humble men of any time who
have worn the blue, the gray, or the brown habit
for love of God and their Father St. Francis*



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FOREWORD

ALL the world knows the story of the Spanish Conquest and settlement of America. Probably the most familiar chapter is that which was enacted by Hernán Cortés and his dauntless conquistadors in the country now called México. And at least the Catholic world understands that when, a year after Christopher Columbus' discovery of the island of Hispaniola, a Bull of Pope Alexander VI granted the claims of the Crowns of Spain and Portugal to the New World, this was because of the Pontiff's serious concern for the Christianization and civilization of its Indian inhabitants.

At that time, no one knew how many hundreds or thousands of miles America might extend to the north, south and west, but it was surmised that the land was exceedingly vast and in places densely populated by pagans. And very soon it was learned that the religious practices of these pagans included human sacrifice by scandalously savage methods, and even cannibalism. Since the first Indians to have been found by Columbus were both friendly and intelligent, many European Catholics hoped for their early conversion to the Faith. This great benefit to the Indians was His Holiness' *only reason* for agreeing to the extension of the Iberian Empire to the New World. If his Bull conceded the claims of these two countries to carefully specified areas in the Americas, it was because these nations were willing to balance their rights by accepting full responsibility for the Christian instruction of the natives, thus providing the means for their salvation.

Actually, most of the conquistadors were men of strong religious faith, quite mindful of their duty to see that the savages were won away from their barbarous practices. After these had been outlawed, the Indians could be properly instructed by the priests — those few who had accompanied the

military expeditions and the others who would shortly follow the Spanish armies across the sea. But it is also true that often the greed of the soldiers resulted in grievous wrongs to the subjugated populations. Many of these conquerors had paid their own expenses for the long trip over the Atlantic and had equipped themselves with horses and arms; all had bravely suffered severe hardship in the winning of America for their king. Now they thought it just that they receive a fair share of the gains of victory.

Gold had been found in abundance in New Spain and gold has always been man's moral undoing. Moreover, after the Conquest had been made and there was land for distribution to the soldiers, it appeared necessary that they be provided with laborers to till their new estates. Entire Indian tribes and towns were forcibly bound into such service, though we must admit that they were never completely enslaved as were our Negroes in the southern agricultural sections of the United States. The Indians were not bought and sold. Usually, they were not separated from their families. Even so, they endured cruel punishments when they rebelled against their new masters, and they undoubtedly suffered a variety of injustices. Their treatment was especially extreme in the case of the native nobility, which was frequently stripped of its wealth and privileges along with its authority. Indians of the lower classes found their circumstances little changed. They had always been either the slaves or servants of their own rulers. Now they had new masters—that was all. And if many of the Spaniards were unjust and heartless, others were perhaps kinder than the Indian aristocracy had been to its own people. It is also true that the Spaniards were far less ruthless and cruel to the Indians they had conquered than the English were to prove a hundred years later in their wars of extermination against the tribes of northern America. However, this is not to say that conditions were always what they should have

been in the Spanish colonies. In some places and at certain times, they were, indeed, very bad.

This was not the fault of the Spanish government, which had promptly passed just laws to control the relations of the colonists and the natives. For example, these laws prohibited Indian slavery as early as the time of the great Queen Isabel la Católica. But soon enough, stories of abuses and lawlessness on the part of the colonists began to filter through to Europe, many of them in reports from the first Spanish priests in America. As might be supposed, this information created dismay in Rome, at the Spanish court and among the religious orders. None of these groups was likely to forget that the moral justification of the Conquest was the conversion of the Indians. If the Spaniards were failing, in many instances, to set a Christian example in the new colonies, how might they hope to win the savages from their shockingly barbarous religious rites?

One of the first and most important parts of New Spain to be subdued and colonized was México. From the landing of the Cortés expedition at Veracruz in 1519, the Conquest — though bloody and violent — had been rapidly consolidated. With the razing of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, in 1521, the Spaniards became masters in fact and a stream of colonists began to flow across the Atlantic Ocean in the wake of the conquistadors.

In a strong effort to secure justice for the vanquished tribes and to guarantee that the great dream of their Christianization should not fail, the Pope authorized the sailing of various groups of missionary priests just as soon as the religious orders could organize expeditions to America. Unaided, the few priests who had accompanied the soldiers as chaplains could not be expected to make any real headway among the great native populations. Thus authorized by His Holiness to commence the splendid Indian missions of the sixteenth century,

the Franciscan Order was the first to set foot on the mainland of America. The part that the men of St. Francis were to play in the dramatic history of New Spain was to become one of Christian America's most notable legacies.

— THE AUTHOR



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THE
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I. FIRST SCHOOLTEACHER

PEDRO DE GANTE was the first of the great Franciscans to ask permission of Rome for a religious expedition to New Spain. The name of this famous scholar, which, translated into English, becomes Peter of Ghent, suggests that he was not a Spaniard, for Ghent was a Flemish city, today included in the country of Belgium. Actually, Peter — or Pedro — was a cosmopolite who was familiar with many European centers. He had been educated at Louvain University; and it is said that he was a kinsman of Emperor Charles V, who, besides being King of Spain, ruled the Holy Roman Empire. As a young man, Pedro had spent much time at the Spanish court, and he had always been devoted to scholarship. In an age of great military exploits, he had taken interest only in learning — and religion.

It is understood, however, that Pedro de Gante did not seek a formal career in the Church until he had passed his fortieth birthday. Even then it was not his ambition to be a priest, but simply a lay Brother in the Franciscan Order. Apparently he felt that he could continue his studies and teaching quite satisfactorily in that capacity. And it is certain that his renown as one of the finest instructors of his time grew even greater after he had become a *fraile* in the gray habit worn in those days by the followers of St. Francis.

When Pedro heard the exciting tales coming back to Europe from America on each returning galleon, like everyone else he was fascinated by the news that far to the west there existed a strange new world inhabited by millions of pagans who, at least in some places, had attained wealth and some degree of culture before they had even heard of the Christian or civilized world. For instance, the Aztecs of México had not

only constructed an amazingly lavish capital but had overcome decided natural handicaps to do so. It had demanded notable feats in engineering to build a city for 300,000 inhabitants on a series of small islands in the center of a wide lake. Such a city was Tenochtitlán, from which the Emperor Moctezuma had been ruling many subject nations before Cortés had deprived him of his great power. Fine bridges and causeways had been designed by the Indians to connect their islands with each other and also the land surrounding the lake. These and the great palaces in which the Aztecs lived, worshiped, and carried on their government and trade had been seen with astonishment by the first Spanish soldiers. So the aborigines were able architects as well as engineers. Examples of their skill in the arts of goldworking and silversmithing, their clever use of feathers for costume and picture design, had come to Europe on the galleons and could be inspected by everyone attached to the Spanish court. It was reported that the Aztec calendar was more accurate than the one used in Europe; that the brown men of the Americas had also made some progress in music. And, while they had no writing in the sense that Europeans knew it, the Indian nobility did use a system of pictograph writing, which was really a sort of stylized drawing, to record their history, their military successes and the prophecies of their priests.

Pedro de Gante was vitally interested in all this information, but he was disturbed to know that many of the achievements of the Aztecs had been destroyed by the Conquest. The beautiful Tenochtitlán had been completely laid waste during its stubborn defense by the Indians, a defense that was in itself admirable and spoke well for the courage and resourcefulness of its citizens. They had been soundly beaten by the conquistadors, of course, and now the victors were exerting themselves to rebuild the Aztec capital for their own use as the Imperial City of México. Many of the Indian princes and

their noble vassals, the only really "cultivated" class among the native populace, had been put to death, while the majority of their subjects had been pressed into menial service by the conquerors.

Pedro knew that this must be a very bitter fate for the proud Aztecs, and he was not by any means satisfied that the substitution of Christianity for the horrid religious rites practiced in México was being handled in the proper spirit. He could not accept the excuses of many Spaniards who were writing to say that the Indians were an "inferior race," incapable of education in the European sense. The evidence of the Indians' past achievements was against any such easy conclusion. Anyway, the Franciscan scholar wanted to go to America to see for himself. He regarded the peoples there, or certainly their children, as potential Christians and he was sure they could be developed into a civilized, educated society.

Pedro de Gante had a close friend in Fray Juan de Tecto, also a Franciscan and at this time confessor to the Emperor. To him, Pedro confided his thoughts and a plan he had made to go to México as a teaching missionary. To his delight, Fray Juan's enthusiasm for such a spiritual adventure matched his own; and they were soon joined in their project by Fray Juan de Ayora, still another mission-minded member of their great Order. These three knew that a full Franciscan mission to New Spain was not yet ready for sailing and they were impatient to be off. They feared that each passing month might be widening the breach between the humiliated Aztecs and their new Spanish masters. If unjust methods were being used to force the Indians into servitude, the harm to the souls of the conquered race might be great, for resentment could easily cause them to refuse to hear the Christian teachings.

Of course, they would need the approval of the Pope and the King for their plan. It seemed wise to leave the task of securing this official authorization in the hands of Fray Juan

de Tecto because of his intimacy with Charles V and also because his great prestige as a theologian gave him considerable influence. But it is likely that Pedro's relationship with the ruling house combined to favor their cause. However it was, the necessary permission was soon obtained and the three Franciscans set out for New Spain. Their zeal survived long weeks aboard one of the cramped galleons of the time and it was in a glow of joyful optimism that they disembarked in August, 1523, going ashore at almost the same spot where Hernán Cortés' valiant, small army had made its own landing exactly four years earlier.

Their plans were quite definite now. They would proceed at once to the great Central Plateau of the Aztecs, up from the hot Gulf coast along the ladder-like trails which rose through flowering, fruit-laden jungles, past the snow-crowned Pico de Orizaba, called Citlaltepētl by the Indians. This is one of the most beautiful volcanoes in the world and the third highest peak on the North American continent.

There were then no public transportation systems in that wilderness. The few horses which the conquerors had brought to the New World were a vital part of the equipment of the soldiers who were still busy subduing outlying tribes, riding out from the immense plateau where the City of México was rising from the rubble and ashes of Tenochtitlán. And, in any event, since St. Francis had prohibited horseback travel for members of the Order, the friars would have to make the journey afoot. But the trails wound through some of the earth's most impressive scenery, and its dramatic beauty must have brightened the long walk which they undertook in high spirits. Beyond El Pico, there were steep canyon beds to ascend, many miles of high valleys to cross, before the three friends must finally make their way over the towering, pine-clad mountain range that lay between these regions and the centers of the old Aztec Empire.

It was a journey of some three hundred miles and it took time. But along the way the missionaries had an opportunity to become acquainted with several Indian tribes. It was possible to observe their differing customs, to judge how their lives had been influenced by the varied terrains and climates (ranging from humid tropics to chill highlands), and to learn the natural resources of each. The friars began to form a picture of the conditions under which they would have to labor as missionaries to this land. To this work they were now dedicating the rest of their lives. Never again would Pedro de Gante, Juan de Tecto or Juan de Ayora see their families, their home places or the luxuries of the Spanish court. And Pedro, at least, was destined to struggle on in this strange but fascinating continent for nearly half a century! However, as far as they knew then, they might be called upon to sacrifice their lives at any moment — perhaps even before arriving at the end of this earliest journey.

Though there was much sullenness in the land, they were not discouraged by what they saw of the natives. Firm in the conviction that kindness and courtesy could win most of God's children anywhere and so here, too, even after many brutalities and injustices, they continued confidently across the mountains and came at last to the second great center of Aztec culture, the city of Texcoco.

* * *

One morning soon after their arrival, Fray Pedro said to Juan de Tecto: "The hospitality with which we have been received here in Prince Ixtlilxochitl's palace is really remarkable. Of course he and his household have all been converted and received baptism. And while some might attribute this to the fact that Governor Cortés has permitted certain privileges to native rulers who agreed to embrace the Faith, I believe that

in this case the conversion is real. At least we were generously invited to live here in the palace where everyone has been most respectful and courteous. Have you noticed the marked intelligence of the boys of this family of Indian nobles? They, too, have been exceptionally kind, always appearing happy to leave their play to take us about the town or to show us the countryside. They are very patriotic and proud, but certainly have shown us no resentment because their land has been conquered by men of our race. I think they realize that we, at least, have not come against them but for them."

"Perhaps the lads of Ixtlilxochitl's house appreciate our motives, Pedro, but they may not be representative, so we mustn't build too much hope on their attitude. As you say, they are unusually intelligent and have the example of the Prince himself. Others may not be so friendly and co-operative. We have already seen plenty of evidence that most of the city is still practicing its own outlandish religious rites, even if secretly. Our work is bound to be very heavy."

"All you say is quite true, but it is certainly favorable that from the palace here we have a good chance to get to know the whole society, under the protection of the highest native authority. This will surely be a great help in founding the school we must give Texcoco immediately — may even popularize it. Oh, there will be a wonderful opportunity to reach and win this city through its children. We must let nothing delay organizing the school."

Father de Tecto, famed theologian that he was, accustomed to teaching advanced subjects, may have felt some consternation at beginning with the instruction of children in the simple rudiments they would have to learn before they might be expected to comprehend the truths of the Christian religion, or even understand history. He smiled ruefully. "I think *we* shall have to become the first students, Pedro. What can we

hope to accomplish until we have mastered the Nahuatl language?"

"Friendship," replied the other. "And that is already coming along. As soon as we have fully won the trust of these poor, confused people who are still smarting under defeat, they will be our friends and give us their loyalty. And meanwhile, we should have small difficulty mastering their tongue. The first thing after that will be to devise a way to write the Nahuatl dialects, which seem to be numerous. We can't do much with their pictographs in the teaching of the subjects we must give them. But it will all come in time. Today we begin work with that student Prince Ixtlilxochitl has assigned to translate the pictographs for us. This remarkable young fellow already speaks Spanish and should prove a great help to us."

Actually, the Franciscans had very little trouble in this matter of language. They were all learned men and they rapidly familiarized themselves with it. By listening carefully to the sounds of words and syllables, they were able to write them in their own alphabet. Thus armed with a double means of communication, they were prepared to realize their great dream, America's first Christian school. Though they had come to convert the natives and teach them primarily the truths of religion, Pedro de Gante was not satisfied that this was all they should offer the Texcocans.

"These people should be given a general education," he told his brother friars at one of their many palace conferences on ways and means. "It will not be enough to instruct them in Christian doctrine only, if they are to be prepared to take their place in this modern sixteenth-century world. We must teach them besides Spanish, reading, writing and a certain amount of Latin grammar, of course; and I am also concerned that they study still other subjects. They have already displayed decided skill in various arts and crafts. They know something of music. Why shouldn't we send home for the stringed in-

struments they do not know, to enlarge their little groups of flute, shell and drum players? Since they draw and paint very nicely in strange styles of their own, why not also give them classes in the art forms of Europe? All these things will make them happy and draw them closer to our own people of whom they are going to see a great deal in the generations ahead. This New Spain will one day be a nation in which their blood and ours will be blended. It cannot forever remain a hostile camp of two opposing cultures. That is not the way of history, and actually both sides have much to contribute in the building of a strong future commonwealth."

The others saw no objection to this plan, but they were naturally disturbed by the persistence of the Indians in clinging to many of their old religious beliefs and customs. Even those who were faithful about attendance at Mass in the little chapel the *frailes* had built immediately upon their arrival at Texcoco, were often caught running off to other ceremonies afterward, the old pagan ceremonies that would destroy the effects of Christian teaching. Although the murderous practice of human sacrifice had been stamped out by Cortés' army, the idolatrous worship of the pagans was still a serious problem.

But on the topic of this revolting practice, too, Fray Pedro had very definite ideas. "It isn't reasonable to expect that we shall gain any lasting success by trying to force these people with harshness or scolding," he declared. "That isn't the way to attract human beings, even to the truth. We can see how the cities whose idols were violently thrown down by our soldiers and replaced by Christian altars and symbols, are holding out against conversion more stubbornly than those which are being more diplomatically handled. I have the greatest confidence that we can win without calling on the army. But the first thing we need is to establish a kindly authority over the children. So the next thing is for us to found our school."

It was an open-air school just at first, held under the great trees of the forest that bordered the wide Lake of Texcoco and spread over the surrounding hills. Only the most necessary things could be provided at the beginning — rude benches and a few devotional books. But the friars had some hand-printed music scores with them and a few holy pictures; and they had already sent to Spain for musical instruments and other equipment. For the rest, the students knew how to make sheets of parchment from the fiber of the maguey, a cactus plant abounding in the vicinity. They would read from and write on that.

The wise Governor of New Spain, Hernán Cortés, who had always preferred friendly relations with the Indians to conquering them by arms, was delighted with Pedro de Gante's ideas for the education of the Texcocan youngsters. He watched the experiment with keen interest and saw that every encouragement was given to the courageous *frailes*. He hoped that soon such schools might be opened in other Indian centers.

Very soon the bland, never-failing friendship offered by Pedro and his two companions had won over many Texcocans, who began to take pride in the progress of their sons. No matter how great the injuries they had sustained in the Conquest, it was easy for the Indians to see that these three men of God were inspired by motives very different from those of the soldiers. The Franciscans' great desire was to alleviate the sufferings of the people and to improve their children. So now, crowds thronged the Masses in Texcoco, thousands sought baptism and Christian instruction, and some were beginning to think of being married according to the law of the Church.

Meanwhile, a thousand boys had been enrolled in Fray Pedro's school, which had been moved indoors as soon as a suitable building could be erected. There he spent his days making the truths of Christ so positive an attraction that there was little need for much direct denunciation of the old ways and the old gods, which had been harsh and unreasoning task-

masters. Any reasonable, intelligent lad could work out the comparison for himself. On the one hand stood the stony-faced, blood-drenched god of war, Huitzilopochtli, only to be appeased by the gore of his victims. On the other side, hung the gentle God-Man, the Crucified Christ, no less awe-inspiring because His cross was splattered with only His own blood, shed for all mankind in the Epitome of all Sacrifice! Yes, the boys of Texcoco were being given so many new concepts, so many new ideas to consider in Fray Pedro's classes that they found themselves quite naturally first neglecting, and then entirely forgetting, their fear of the fury of old Huitzilopochtli.

* * *

It must not be supposed that since Fray Pedro was uncompromisingly opposed to the use of force in the conversion of the Indians, he was a weak disciplinarian. Not by any means. Though he won his pupils through kindness and love, he did not pamper them or accept easy excuses for poor behavior. In many ways the Indians were all rather childish and they had little regard for exact schedules or individual responsibility. On one occasion, Fray Pedro entered a catechism class to find it in rare confusion. The boys had not learned their assigned lesson and were wasting time in nonsense. He immediately took charge of the situation, personally replacing the regular instructor who had failed to keep matters under control. Soberly explaining to the boys that work was *not* play and that study was work, he warned them that the class would not be dismissed until everyone had mastered the day's lesson, regardless of how many hours it might take. He would hold them until they had all recited to his satisfaction!

Afternoon dragged into evening and still the recitations droned on raggedly. The pupils began to feel quite sorry for themselves, especially when they understood that they were

going to miss their suppers. Still Fray Pedro held the class. When a delegation of worried Indian fathers showed up to learn why their sons had not come home for the evening meal, the students, boy-like, were on the alert to see what would happen now!

Nothing much happened. Fray Pedro merely explained the difficulty to the adult Texcocans, stating flatly that only when this day's catechism was letter perfect would the class be released. The parents were somewhat abashed but objected that the youngsters might become ill without nourishment. To this, Fray Pedro replied that it would be all right with him if they wished to send in the boys' food, but that under no circumstances was it to be delivered by the mothers, as he had found that women were frequently inclined to coddle their sons and that he would support no self-pity in his classes! He suggested that, if they were discontented with this arrangement they had best take the matter up with the civil authorities, for this was the only concession he was prepared to make. Now the Indians had no wish to consult the civil authorities, who were not their friends. Fray Pedro was their friend and their benefactor. His terms were accepted and, needless to say, the catechism was successfully learned.

Before long, Fray Pedro had put through a compulsory education law much like modern laws of that kind. If the boys did not attend school regularly, their fathers could be held accountable. The law worked very well and, though they may not have known it, the young Texcocans were soon receiving an education in no wise inferior to that of many European boys of their century.

Thus passed the first year, not a long time in which to lead most of the children and many of the adults of a good-sized pagan stronghold into the Christian Church. It was a short time even in which to establish a training school with an enrollment of a thousand boys. Few schools grow that fast

today, even in communities where they are in great demand; whereas in the case of Fray Pedro's school the desire to attend had first to be cultivated in the minds of semi-barbarous aborigines who were still nursing their injuries, both real and imagined. And besides his classroom work, the energetic Brother had the duty of securing the spiritual welfare of countless other converts, of shouldering his part of the burden of erecting churches and shrines. He and his faithful associates baptized thousands of Indians of all ages, preached tirelessly, performed the dozens of offices required of missionaries and parish priests in every time. It should be explained that, although Pedro de Gante was not an ordained priest, he was a famed preacher and apparently had been granted dispensation for much work that ordinarily only priests of the Church have the privilege of performing. And, of course, Juan de Tecto, his great friend and counselor, and Juan de Ayora were priests.

With so much detail on their hands, it is understandable that the missionaries were overjoyed by news that the first full Franciscan mission to México, numbering twelve friars, was on its way, laboriously and afoot, from Veracruz to the plateau. Here was help — for México, for the objectives of the Church, and for Fray Pedro and the two Fray Juans. Now they could take satisfaction in displaying their accomplishments to their Provincial, Fray Martín de Valencia. In large measure they had done the spade work for the men of St. Francis who were approaching, work without which the new missionaries would have found things still more difficult than they were bound to prove. It was something, they thought. It was indeed much, though they were humble about their contribution and only regretful that three could not have done more for this enormous pagan populace.

It was sad to learn then, after they had welcomed their brothers in religion, that Fray Martín seemed somewhat more horrified that certain pagan religious practices still existed in

Texcoco after their short year's labor, than gratified by the gains they had almost miraculously made in such time. A fine but somewhat severe priest, Father Martín could not understand why the old heathen altars had not all been obliterated and the Indians wrested from the grip of their errors — by force, if necessary.

Fray Pedro was naturally disturbed. He had been so sure that his way had been the wiser; that the friendship of the countless natives they had won by tolerance and kindness gave greater promise of the eventual complete Christianization of the land than peremptory methods would have obtained! In a council of the Franciscans at which Fray Martín endeavored to understand exactly *what* had been going on (a meeting attended by both Governor Hernán Cortés and Prince Ixtlil-xochitl, it appears) Fray Pedro underwent a stern interrogation by the Provincial, the while praying that he might be able to make his superior see how vital it was to maintain the good relations now existing between the three missionaries and the Texcocans.

Juan de Tecto knew the spirit of Pedro de Gante as no one else could know it. And he feared that if Pedro were allowed to answer Fray Martín's questions, his enthusiasm for the system they had adopted for the conversion of Texcoco might carry him into expressions a little too emphatic for the liking of the Provincial. He, Father de Tecto, was the theologian, the experienced diplomat of the trio. So it was Fray Juan who rose to his feet to meet the test, motioning Fray Pedro to keep his place.

Calmly and very sincerely, Fray Juan then reported on the progress that had been made during these months in Texcoco. He spoke of the numbers of baptisms, sermons and instructions conferred on the Indians. He related the story of the school and its ambitious work; of what had been done for the ill and needy. Patiently, he analyzed the grounds for the belief that

they had shared, the policy first put forward by Fray Pedro: that little could be hoped for in the winning of the pagans — still suffering so much at the hands of the gold- and land-hungry soldiers and settlers — if first of all their trust was not secured. What good would it have done for three lone men to turn their energies to constant nagging against the old beliefs? How would violent destruction of the idols and places of worship with the assistance of a hated army have improved their chances of making *true conversions*? Many who *had* come to the Faith through the influence of their sons and because of gratitude to the men who were educating their children, might never have capitulated if force had been any part of their program!

The missionaries were not dealing here with backsliding Christians or with ordinary criminals. They were laboring for the souls of a race that was in some ways very childish and in other ways barbarous. The problem was to implant in such a people a totally new ideal of life and order. True, the Indians were reasonable beings and therefore teachable; but since most of their history had been one of war and bloodshed, so that even their deities had been horrific gods of war, only satisfied by offerings of human hearts torn from living bodies, they were already expert in violence. If the missionaries were to permit new violences and in the cause of the Prince of Peace, wasn't that a contradiction in terms, and anyway hopeless?

The eloquent Fray Juan was an excellent advocate. Turning to Governor Cortés, who had commanded the Conquest, he asked confirmation of his declaration that the destruction of the temples and altars at Cempoalla and Cholula had been a mistake serving no good end for the Faith. Cortés admitted this. Prince Ixtlilxochitl added his agreement from the viewpoint of a Christian Indian and a ruler of Indians.

Father Martín was certainly revolted by the knowledge that pagans continued to practice their repulsive idolatry in a de-

feated city which had known Christian missionaries for a year, but he could not help being impressed by the sincerity of Fray Juan and these experienced rulers. Finally, Juan invited the Provincial to visit the school that had been established through Fray Pedro's dedication and enthusiasm. There he could see *exactly* what they had been doing with their time to offset the influence of the pagan rites still unfortunately being observed by some of the Texcocans.

At the school, Pedro's students gave Fray Martín a very edifying afternoon. When the building and the facilities had been inspected, the boys were assembled to sing their hymns and Christian Doctrine, which sounded rather odd set to the weird old Indian scores. This combination of Christian words and the familiar pagan musical themes had seemed a convenient system, but the result must have made a rather barbaric impression on unaccustomed ears. However, it was clear enough that the lads enjoyed the singing. When it was finished, Fray Martín was still worried. He spoke to Fray de Tecto: "All this appears to be a trifle indulgent and to be regarded as play by these little ones. Can we have forgotten that Christian instruction is a serious matter?"

"But this *is* serious, Father," smiled the other. "You will see. Just wait until you hear Fray Pedro instructing these boys. He has made the Faith loved in each of these young hearts. Besides, the children know him for a determined teacher. Have you not heard, Father, that this Christian education is compulsory for the Texcoco boys?"

Fray Martín had not known or, if he had heard, had forgotten. He glanced quizzically toward Prince Ixtlilxochitl. The Indian nobleman had overheard the exchange. "Yes, my Father, our boys *must* attend their classes. If there is a failure in this, their parents are held responsible under the law."

In spite of himself, the Provincial began to relax. And now Pedro de Gante was addressing his students. Plainly and care-

fully, he spoke to them of the teachings of the Church, using the Nahuatl, with which he was already completely familiar, so that there might be no possibility for misunderstanding. He was commanding the full attention of every pupil. It was quite obvious to Fray Martín that they all loved and trusted him. From whom might they be expected to learn so readily as from a respected and beloved teacher who had made his first aim the sympathetic understanding of their hearts? Fray Pedro had taught himself their language in order to know their thoughts, and through talks with his charges to impart his lessons. By this time he knew their problems, history, sufferings. He had spared no pains to show them that the Spaniards were not in México primarily as conquerors and grasping masters. If some Spaniards behaved as though this were the truth, they were wrong. The crimes of the bad ones would be dealt with in time, if not by their great King in Spain, then by the Greatest of Kings. The fighting had been justified *if* it brought the Aztecs the blessings of Christianity, which was the only objective of the missionaries. Their own teachers, himself and the two Fray Juans, and now these twelve newly arrived Franciscans, were their friends. There would soon come a new day for America — a Christian day, when these very schoolboys of Texcoco would be the Christian fathers of Christian Americans! As Fray Pedro talked, Juan de Tecto translated his words into Spanish for the Provincial's benefit.

Martín de Valencia found himself won over by such wisdom. Turning once more to the astute Fray Juan, he said simply, with Christian humility: "It is true that much has been accomplished here. If we who compose this mission can each do as well as our good Brother Pedro, everything he is telling these boys must certainly come true for the Indians of New Spain."*

*Translated from Ezequiel Chávez' *Pedro de Gante* (México, D. F.: Editorial Jus, 1943).

This was but the beginning of Pedro's long and amazing career for God and His poor children in México. Following the arrival of the mission, the school could be left in good hands while Fray Pedro traveled to the city of Tlaxcala to found another great teaching center. Meanwhile, his dear brothers, Juan de Tecto and Juan de Ayora, had left for Honduras with Hernán Cortés on the great soldier's current expedition. This was an ill-fated enterprise from the beginning, and both these brave Franciscans died of hardship and exhaustion in the steaming jungles before Cortés was barely able to escape and return to México, a wreck of his former self. Fray Pedro was sharply grieved by the tragic death of his companions and it was for him a bitter loss. The wise Fray Juan de Tecto — the distinguished theologian — and the good Fray Juan de Ayora, had gone to their rewards. They had shared his great dream. Now he was left to carry it out alone. That was, of course, the important fact in the light of which he must not permit himself to indulge personal sorrow too greatly. On his knees before his crucifix, the symbol of man's redemption, he prayed that he might only remember that now his own strength must be all the greater in his labors for the salvation of an entire race of Christ's little ones. Of the original high-hearted group, only he, Pedro de Gante, was left to continue the struggle for the souls of Indian youth! With God's help, he would succeed.

In time, he moved on to the capital, now a thriving city risen from the ruins of Tenochtitlán. There he constructed an enormous church, even though for a while he had to content himself with providing only a thatched roof for it. He built also the great school of San José and a hospital for the Indians. And during his career he built a hundred churches. He was saddened to see that many of his fellow Europeans persisted in discovering ways to break the laws Spain had enacted for the protection of the natives. Europe was far away, the mails

slow and irregular. It was almost impossible to bring effective legal action against the offenders. However, Fray Pedro persevered for his Indians, laboring to enlighten them and at the same time to protect them from injustice. When he could not persuade the colonists to mend their ways, he availed himself of his kinship with the Spanish monarchs to inform them in stern personal letters about the abuses of many of their subjects who had settled in New Spain.

Through good times and bad times, he fought on. Occasionally, the crimes of his countrymen nearly drove him to distraction. He always realistically regarded the Indians as the basic element of the new Christian nation to be welded in México. Once, when the Spaniards' injustice toward them was too much to bear — it was a moment when his resources were exhausted, the coffers of his school in México City were empty — he was driven to forward the strongest condemnation he had ever made of the colonists. The letter was addressed to Charles V, his cousin. This is part of what he wrote:

Now it has been ordered that all the Indians living in villages for twenty miles around México City must each bring in a load of wood and then pay tribute on it! It is two days' work cutting and transporting the wood and it takes two days to return to their homes. On the trip they eat miserably and all they receive is half a *real** for their work and the wood. What terrible cruelty! Every day there are fewer Indians in each village. And they are vassals of Your Majesty, whose salvation cost the blood of Jesus Christ!

When departing from their villages, where their masters have left them nothing, neither lands nor food, they are sometimes unable to return for a month, meanwhile having to earn with their labor all that they need. . . .

All these miserable Mexicans are forced to labor in this country, many for masters who do not even live in México. They must provide the rich with other Indians for servants, must collect and supply, besides the wood, fiber and chickens, despite the fact that they, the poor Indians, have none of these things in their villages.

*A coin worth about 12c.

And if Your Majesty does not provide that tribute be levied as in Spain upon those who have possessions and never on those who have nothing, I fear that in thirty years these lands will be as depopulated as the Islands and all these souls lost and Your Majesty's heart stricken with remorse.

I beg Your Majesty to take care of his flock and see that our Redeemer Jesus Christ shall not have shed His blood in vain for tribute and injustices to some of His children by others of His children, because such lack of charity is a great sin against God. Therefore, it is only just that the laws which Your Majesty has already made to protect the poor Indians be strictly enforced, for it is slavery in many forms that is destroying these people.

It would be merciful if Your Majesty would grant to these impoverished and miserable Indians and to our great school here in México, six hundred *pesos* yearly in view of the many who must still be protected and instructed. Without such a donation the very school itself will be lost since the natives have nothing left to contribute toward its support. It is but just that what I ask be granted in view of how hard and long I have labored among them and because it is my intention to end my life instructing them.

Your Majesty's servant,

FRAY PEDRO DE GANTE*

Fortunately, the just heart of the Spanish monarch was touched and he did grant Fray Pedro's request for financial aid. He also took immediate action to insure a stricter enforcement of the really fine Indian laws. Thus the work could go on and Pedro maintain his great hope for a happier future for his Indian children. If he could not always guarantee them justice, since so many of the colonists still seemed to regard them as the spoils of war, he could and did bring them the blessing of the personal Christian solution that could console their hearts. And they could be sure he would be there beside them, their unfailing champion.

Nothing in the world, neither homesickness, hardship nor earthly honors, might serve to tear this devoted aristocrat from

*Extract from letter dated February 15, 1552, in *Códice Franciscano*, Vol. I, from the Gante Collection in the Biblioteca Nacional, México, D. F.

the lowly ones he had chosen. Despite the fact that he was a lay Brother of his Order, if also one of its most learned members, he could have been made Bishop of México. But he declined this honor. His students needed him, his many institutions required his daily attention. Episcopal glories were not for him. He had long occupied the place to which he knew God had assigned him!

Pedro de Gante lived more than ninety years, active to the end in his blessed work. Eventually he found himself teaching the grandsons of his first scholars. And in his heart he must have taken great joy in the good it had been given him to accomplish. Never did he return to Spain to see again the luxurious scenes in which he had spent his first forty comfortable years. Never was he to be reunited with his relatives or old friends or enjoy the association of his equals in education and culture. Never did he take a vacation or the time to rest. But also, never was any resentment of the Indians directed against him, no matter how much they might hate their foreign masters. They knew that he had given them his life and that nothing would tempt him to leave them or to abandon their interests. His strength, his time, his vast knowledge and faith were theirs. Their reciprocation of his love is a legend in México today where it is stated: "Fray Pedro may have been a Brother, but he was a true Father to millions of Mexicans from his day to ours." It is recalled that he was the only European of his own time to have been honored by the Aztecs with a great *fiesta*, given at Xochimilco to celebrate his return from one of his many tours of school inspection. Today his memory is still a living influence in the land where streets and institutions are called by his name. In 1572 when his death marked the end of nearly half a century of loving service to New Spain, he was mourned for many weeks by tens of thousands of inconsolable Mexicans.

He had been gone some months when one day there arrived at the portal of the Franciscan Monastery in México City an old hill Indian asking to see the Father Guardian. When he had been granted admittance, the leather-faced ancient placed a bundle on the Father Guardian's desk. Unwrapped, it revealed an exquisite vestment ablaze with rich, gold embroidery.

The words came slowly as though with great effort: "Padre, this is a *capa* which I have made with my hands for the beloved of my people, Fray Pedro de Gante. I ask you to see that he receives it."

Thinking that the man was ignorant of the death of Fray Pedro, the priest answered gently: "I am sorry, my son, but what you ask is impossible. Our great Brother, Pedro de Gante, has passed from this life and at the wish of your people lies buried in the patio of his school. Did you not hear?"

"*Padrecito*, during the long years of our sadness, the holy Fray Pedro taught us and truly that all men are brothers, sons of the same Great Father. And he said it, that this was true both here and hereafter, now and forever. It is because the good little Brother made us this gift without price that I have worked for him so lovely a *capa*. And now there is a thing, Father; you must surely see that he receives it." Then, after respectfully kissing the hand of the amazed Franciscan, the old Indian moved stiffly out of the study, leaving the shimmering vestment where he had spread it across the desk.

For some moments, the Father Guardian looked after the rickety old figure, bemused. Then his gaze turned to rest upon a portrait of Pedro de Gante which hung on the wall. His lips moved slightly and his words came in the merest whisper: "Dear Brother Pedro. Truly you *have* received your gift — to hold as they will hold the one you gave them — now and forever."

II. FIRST GREAT VICTORY FOR GOD

THE Mexican people claim that there is a special mystical significance in the fact that the first full mission to New Spain consisted of twelve men.* Had not the original Apostles of Christ been twelve?

Under the direction of the holy Provincial Martín de Valencia, these Franciscans had reached the Mexican shores in 1524. On bare feet they had tramped up the rising land from seacoast to the high, wide-flung plateau. Before reaching the capital they had witnessed an amazing scene. As the worn and bedraggled friars toiled across the plain, they saw coming to welcome them a gorgeous company indeed. It was the rich and brilliant entourage of the great Conquistador Hernán Cortés. When the unassuming men of God and the dashing soldiers of the Spanish King came together, the famed Captain General gave the example by throwing himself upon his knees before the *frailes* and reverently kissing the hems of their torn and mud-caked habits! The multitude of Indians who had followed the soldiers out from the city, as well as those who had gathered from near by, were astounded to see the homage paid to these tired and travel-stained friars by the lordly rulers of New Spain. They had not dreamed that their conquerors might ever submit themselves so humbly to anyone, and this little company they were reverencing was made up of shabby and poverty-stricken men, as all could recognize. To Aztec notion, this was quite as shocking an event as had been the arrival of the oddly clad, white-faced warriors and their outlandish horses five years before. Until 1519, the Aztecs had never seen white men, nor horses. Until 1524, they had never witnessed the sight of proud masters of any race on their knees before men dressed almost as beggars. What could

*In Fray Martín's group nine besides himself were priests, and the remaining two were lay Brothers.

it mean? Were there then some more worthy of obeisance than the magnificent Governor Cortés with his flags and standards borne triumphantly aloft — men to whom even he knelt? It was a riddle and no doubt about it. But it seemed both diplomatic and courteous to follow his lead. So the Indians also knelt.

* * *

Each of these twelve honored Franciscans was to do his work with an almost fanatical zeal that would leave its mark on American history forever. Nevertheless, there was one among them who would always be outstanding even in such a dedicated company. His name was Padre Toribio de Benavente, but this is not the name by which he is called today nor by which he was ever known in México. Fray Toribio has always been loved and honored in America as "*Motolinía*," and this is why:

The Nahuatl word for "poor" was "*motolinía*," or at least that is how it had sounded to the Franciscans when they first heard its syllables ejaculated by the great crowds of Indians who greeted their arrival at towns along the route to the capital of New Spain. In their amazement at the impoverished appearance of this entirely new sort of white man, the Indians had repeated this word "*motolinía*" many times. They had not been accustomed to think of white men as poor and they kept discussing this marvel among themselves. The friars, on the alert to learn as much as possible of the native languages, soon heard this word. It was, in fact, the first that Fray Toribio was able to make out.

Of a Spaniard who understood something of the Nahuatl, he asked: "What means this word '*motolinía*,' *hijito*?"

"It wishes to say '*pobre*,' *mi padre* — 'poor.'"

"Poor," repeated the missionary quietly and then, as he felt a strange joy stirring in his heart, "how lovely a sound and how holy its meaning — poverty!" He fell silent for a few moments. But finally he looked up at the great azure skies of his new country and murmured as if to himself: "This exquisite word, my first-known Nahuatl word, I now take for my own name!"

And this was how it happened that all his missionary life he was to sign himself Fray Toribio de Motolinía — Father Toribio of Poverty. It was to be a sign for him and of him. It associated him in his vocation as a follower of the Little Poor Man, St. Francis, with the lot he had chosen for himself in the New World and the ideals he would so lovingly teach here! And it has come down to us today as a symbol of all that the early Franciscans were and did in America, a symbol of diligence and sacrifice, and of glory, too.

It was Padre Motolinía who would completely record for us the wonderful chapter of the Franciscan story that took place in New Spain between 1524 and 1540. His was a lively interest in all that he saw and heard as he traveled widely about the vast realms of the old Indian nations of México and Guatemala; and he possessed the ability to put it all into simple but moving Spanish. His observations and descriptions of those times as he noted them in his book, "*Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*," have been studied and treasured through every epoch from then to now. And this "*History of the Indians of New Spain*" is still one of the finest reference books that we have on the life, beliefs and customs of the savages in México at the time of the Spaniards' arrival, and on the Franciscans' holy fight to reform these matters.

From this history we learn that Motolinía and his brothers in religion were at first distributed among the four Provinces directed from México City, Texcoco, Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo. In these centers of population they took their assigned places

to face the hordes of superstitious, idol-worshipping brown men, all of whom they undertook to reach with the Word of God. They preached, built monasteries, churches, schools and hospitals — work that Fray Pedro de Gante and his two veritably martyred companions had already introduced on a smaller scale in Texcoco. Those who were able learned the Indian tongues, so that soon most of the missionaries could speak them fairly well. Then they set to work to persuade the Indians that they were very much mistaken to believe in the existence of gods who demanded the elaborate and bloody sacrifice of one's enemies, one's slaves and sometimes even one's children — all of which they had been accustomed to regard as a religious duty. There was simply one true, all-powerful God, Whose wish was that they love Him and one another in peace and Christian charity so that they might save their immortal souls and live in His heaven through eternity.

Our own priests today know what a discouraging struggle it is to make a few converts among so-called civilized nations. What, then, must have been the labor of these first missionaries to America's millions of savages? Motolinía tells us what it was like. Writing from Tehuacán or Tlaxcala or wherever he happened to be laboring among the many tribes of the land, he described how the *padres* commenced by preaching outdoors; by saying their Masses in the *salas* or large rooms of public buildings until churches could be built. He wrote:

"During the first year following the *frailes'* arrival in this land, they commenced to gather together the Indians of México and Tlaltelolco, those of one *barrio* or parish one day and those of another parish the next. Going to them, the *padres* would teach them and baptize the babies." Soon, two by two, the Franciscans were visiting many towns and districts introducing the Faith to the pagans. Large numbers of these simple folk had but to hear the Word to be won to Christianity. This is surprising, however, when we consider how violent

and inhumane their own devotions had always been. But the missionaries must have won their trust quickly, for almost at once they began to bring in their idols for destruction, asking for baptism and catechism lessons. In many instances the conversion of whole towns was made easier when it happened that their rulers or chiefs were won away from paganism, for, of course, this gave the common people more confidence in leaving their old customs. Motolinía said of one such case:

"In this town (Cuitlahuac) there was a good Indian, one of the three principal lords of the place who, being a man of greater culture (than most) and very old, governed all the town. Two or three times he sent for the friars and when they arrived he would not leave them but spent most of the night asking them things which he wished to know about our Faith. The next morning, the people congregated, and after Mass and the sermon many babies were baptized, among whom the greater number were the sons, nephews and relatives of this good man, who afterward begged Fray Martín to baptize *him*. Seeing his holy pleading and that he was a man of good reason, he did baptize him, calling him Francisco. . . . This Indian gave a fine example for all those of the lake region, bringing many children in to the monastery of San Francisco, and these learned so fast that they were soon seen to be making better progress than those who had entered much earlier. This Don Francisco improved each day in his understanding of God and he observed the Commandments. . . ."

* Since Fray Motolinía spent much time in the same monasteries with Fray Martín, it is probable that he had been an eyewitness to this sequence of events

Among other nobles who gave the example by asking for baptism almost immediately was a son of Moctezuma, the ill-fated emperor of the Aztecs who had been so devoted to his

**Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (México, D. F.: Editorial Salvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1941), pp. 113-114.

pagan gods that he had accepted defeat and capture by Cortés without defending himself, believing that his deities had so ordained it. Fray Motolinía wrote that, owing to illness, Moctezuma's son was seated in a chair during his baptism. As he received the Sacrament, not only his body but the chair itself, shook as violently as if there had been a strong earthquake. In such ways, God gave the Franciscans native aides in high places. This and many other inexplicable happenings made a deep impression on the Indians. In his "History of the Indians" Fray Motolinía stated that during their first fifteen years in New Spain some eighty *frailes* had baptized more than nine million pagans!

The next step in the true Christianization of the people was to make sure that they would practice the religion that so many had accepted with baptism. Penitence and confession had to be painstakingly explained. This was no small labor, since the missionaries were few and not all of them found it easy to learn the Nahuatl. But once the Indians understood that God demanded their repentance, they proved to be both diligent and clever at finding means of making their confession. When necessary, they would write out their sins in the pictograph or picture writing that they used, bringing their parchments in for the priests to examine and understand before they might absolve the new Christians. Although it was so much work, the Indians did not content themselves with doing it once a year during Lent, but repeated this elaborate preparation for the reception of the Sacrament before all the principal feasts. Motolinía stoutly declared that he had never seen Catholics more diligent, adding: "Since the confessors were so few, the Indians walked from one monastery to another, looking for one to confess to; and they thought nothing of walking sixty to eighty miles to make their confessions."*

*The first monasteries were separated from one another by some forty or fifty miles.

And so seriously did the Indians take their penance that, in the opinion of Fray Motolinía, they busied themselves remarkably, making the strictest restitution of everything they might have gained by dishonesty or unfairness of the slightest degree. More than this, they made restitution of goods which they had inherited when they judged it had not been justly acquired by their fathers and grandfathers. If it was impossible to locate the persons who had been injured through the loss of such property, the penitents left the equivalent value (and occasionally more than the value, according to the statements of the same Father historian) with the *frailles* to be given to the poor. Surely this proved that they were understanding their lessons very well, for by such acts they were making a practical application of Christian Doctrine at real inconvenience to themselves.

As we have said before, the wealthy Indians had always held slaves, but now, seeing clearly that the whole idea of human bondage was not in accord with Christ's teachings, they commenced to free their slaves. It seems rather wonderful that more than four hundred years ago peoples so recently barbarous and pagan were able to recognize an evil that we of the United States had to fight a great war to abolish as late as the second half of the nineteenth century!

The next vital problem confronting the missionaries concerned the establishment of Christian homes. The Indian nobles and even those of moderate wealth had been accustomed to claim as many wives as they wished or could support. This, incidentally, had brought about such a scarcity of unattached women that many of the poorer natives could find no one at all to marry. The friars, of course, could not tolerate polygamy among their converts, and they worked continuously to instill the Christian ideal of marriage in the hearts and minds of the people. They succeeded, little by little, but it was not a simple matter. Beyond the selfishness and carnal habits of the men,

there arose the problem of what to do with the women who must be sent away if the men were to enter into holy matrimony under the law of the Church. Arrangements for their welfare and the support of their children had to be made. However, the details were worked out in time and, one after another all who sincerely wished to be Christians came in to be married. When this happened, it was noticeable that the extra wives who had to be put away were capable of sacrificing their material interests as unselfishly as the men. Truly the Franciscans had great reason to give thanks to God that their teachings were being accepted and were bearing fine fruit for New Spain!

This adoption of Christian law and European custom brought the Indians and Spaniards into a more closely knit society, from which the priests could greatly hope for the welding of an honest and steadfast nation in México. Through Christian practice, the cultural differences between Spaniard and Indian would eventually disappear. Through intermarriage, the racial differences would all but disappear, too, in the course of time. The idea of Christian intermarriage did not disturb the missionaries as it disturbs so many good people today. They were honest students of history and they knew that no really "pure" races exist anyway. Every race on earth at that time (as at this time in which we live) was a mixture. Christ had not indicated that He regarded His brethren as members of one race or another. They were all children of God. He had made no rules against intermarriage, but only rules *for Christian marriage*. Prejudices against any race or against the mingling of the races through holy wedlock are strictly the invention of man, and they usually create nothing but injustice.

* * *

It is hard to understand how Fray Motolinía found the time to write a work on the Conquest that comprises a volume

of some three hundred pages in its published form. There was so much to do that he must scarcely have been able to interrupt his multitudinous activities even for necessary sleep; for he was known as the most industrious and active of all the busy friars dedicated to this heavy work in New Spain. He labored to build churches and monasteries. He performed all the services that priests do anywhere and he did it among pagans who, at the beginning, were totally ignorant of everything Christian or, in our meaning of the word, civilized. He catechized, baptized, heard confessions, performed the marriage ceremony for thousands of couples each year. He cared for the ill and labored for the foundation of hospitals. He ministered to the dying. Moreover, he worked in many widely separated places to and from which he had always to travel afoot. At one time he trudged all the way to Guatemala to establish the great Church and Monastery of San Francisco in Santiago de los Caballeros! His was the duty and the honor of having to say Mass in places where Mass had never before been celebrated. Such was the case at Puebla de los Angeles, a city he had also founded for Spaniards halfway between the Mexican capital and Tehuacán. Today, when Puebla is known as the most religious city in all the country, its residents still proudly recall that it was Fray Motolinía who gave them their city and gave their forefathers the joy of their first Mass at that place.

This tireless priest loved the Indians dearly; his "Historia" is full of innocent boasts of their goodness and Christian integrity. He often compared them with the Spaniards to the latter's disadvantage. He had never seen anywhere the devotion and true Christian piety that countless converted heathens were soon offering to God in America — and he said so. And the Indians loved him! It is a legend in Tehuacán that when it became known there that their beloved "poor one" had been ordered to leave the Monastery of Nuestra Señora de la Con-

cepción for a new station in Guatemala, some of the heart-broken natives tried to prevent his going by tying up his feet so that they could not walk away from Tehuacán! This was foolish, but the Indians' love was not foolish. It was based on their realization of how much they owed him. Had he not laid out the streets of their town? Had he not comforted them and taught them a thousand things that had improved their daily living? Their unfailing benefactor, was he not one with them in poverty? Particularly did little children and the women owe him a great debt. The countless marriages he had witnessed had secured the blessings of the Christian home for the children, while the abolition of polygamy had granted the Indian woman her first dignity. Above all and *for ever* he had made every one of them the most precious gift that man can be given — the Living Church of Christ.

Of course the whole Franciscan mission was engaged in the same giving and, generally speaking, all its members were loved as well as respected by the Indians. But perhaps because of the special graces God had given Fray Motolinía, his became the most widely spoken name among the group in his own time. And his is the name still most revered in memory of the twelve who spread the charity of Christ in New Spain. One may well believe this to be the fulfillment of the promise that lay in the inspiration and act of Fray Toribio de Benavente when he so promptly chose the Nahuatl term "*motolinía*" (a truly American word for expressing "poverty," the ideal of the Little Poor Man of Assisi) to be that name!

But, though for many reasons, known and unknown, he was to be first among his holy companions, he was also always last in his own record of events and in his own humble heart. Every place in his "*Historia*" where he found it necessary to list the *frailes* with whom he walked and toiled and cherished the Indians under Fray Martín's able direction, the name of Toribio de Motolinía invariably appears last in the record. In another

way, too, he was to be last, for of the whole group he was the twelfth to die. Eleven had already gone before his death in 1569. "*The last shall be first, and the first last.*" To many, many Mexicans, Fray Motolinía will always be *the first and the last* of their greatly revered first Franciscan mission.



III. THE BOY MARTYRS OF TLAXCALA

A VERY few years after the arrival of the Franciscan mission to the American pagans, Fray Martín de Valencia, the upright and austere Provincial, might have been found serving as Guardian at the Order's monastery in the town of Tlaxcala. There he was making the instruction of the boys in the monastery school one of his principal occupations. Perhaps Fray Martín could never bring himself to be quite so lenient as Pedro de Gante with the illegal heathen practices still persisting in New Spain, for his was a very stern character and he was always appalled by the very idea of any compromise with right. But the pious and self-denying priest readily appreciated Fray Pedro's wisdom in advancing toward the conversion of the natives by first attracting and educating their children. And in this work Fray Martín was soon gaining a gratifying success of his own, notwithstanding the fact that his task was complicated by a faulty knowledge of the Nahuatl. Even before he left Spain the good man was already middle-aged and in poor health. Moreover, it had long been his custom to devote sev-

eral hours daily to prayer and meditation, and he made frequent fasts. In view of all these circumstances, it was difficult for him to find the strength and time to master the Indian tongues, and he had to make use of interpreters for his classes. These assistants were clever young Tlaxcalans who had managed to pick up some Spanish. With their aid, Fray Martín succeeded very well in teaching the children, and in the end three of the interpreters became *frayles* themselves, showing how forceful a teacher the Franciscan really was.

Of course the first thing that had to be made clear to the little pagans attending classes at the monastery was that the multitude of deities adored by their ancestors were mere figures of stone and wood, quite powerless to protect, bestow favors, punish or forgive sins. And while Fray Martín used many strong phrases to denounce these idols as devils rather than gods, what he probably meant was that their worship and the bloody sacrifices offered them were *the devil's way* of preventing the Indians from hearing the truths of Christianity. Until the coming of Cortés' army, the pagan cults of México had been accustomed to sacrifice a hundred thousand men, women and children every year. This was personally done by the Indian priests who, after cutting open the chests of the living victims, tore out their hearts to offer them to their gods. Afterward, the bodies of the unfortunates were *eaten* by the people who had watched the whole sacrificial proceedings with ecstasy. This was the terrible fate of the Aztecs' prisoners of war; and, when these were too few to satisfy the imagined demands of the deities, slaves were sacrificed and even the tribes' own children. Cortés had outlawed these gory practices, of course, and now the Christian missionaries were stoutly teaching that none of this tragic waste was necessary or even tolerable. There was but one all-powerful God, Who had sent His Divine Son Jesus Christ to sacrifice Himself in order to put an end to all violence and ugliness forever! To love Him and

obey Him in all things was what was necessary. For love of Him, all His children must love and cherish each other.

As might be imagined, many of the boys saw the logic of this preaching soon enough, and some of Fray Martín's little converts were so deeply stirred that they were willing to risk their own lives to bring their great new Faith in Jesus Christ to their misled fellow Indians. It is often observed that nations seem to receive immense blessings through the martyrdom of their Christians, if only in result of the fact that the voluntary sacrifice of life in a cause *has to be recognized* by everyone as certain proof of the sincerity of the martyrs. One of the effects of such sincerity on the part of Christian martyrs is that it is bound to bring others to the Church.

Some of our first American martyrs were to be drawn from among the boys taught by Fray Martín at Tlaxcala.

* * *

Fray Martín was speaking about a very serious matter to two of the handsomest and most aristocratic students in his classes. It is not recorded whether he had need of an interpreter for even a simple conversation. Perhaps not, since he had endeavored to learn some Nahuatl; or perhaps the Tlaxcalan boys, Antonio and Diego, understood Spanish. They were very intelligent, and it is always easier for children to acquire new languages than it is for older persons.

"*Muchachos*, we all know the object of the zealous Dominican Father Bernardino Minaya, who has lately come to pay us a visit in this monastery on his way to Oaxaca in the south. He has already asked for volunteers from among our boys to aid him in his work for the Faith. He believes that no one can hasten the conversion of a people more than its own Christian children. Now I hear that you two have answered Fray Bernardino's call and have said you wish to leave us to accompany him. This is why I have called you to me. Is my infor-

mation correct? Do you really wish to leave Tlaxcala and your classes to go with Fray Bernardino?"*

"*Sí, mi padre,*" replied Antonio promptly. "With your permission, this is what Diego and I plan to do. We are certain that we can be useful to Fray Bernardino."

"Of that there is little doubt. But have you considered well all the possible results of such a decision, my son? I worry that you will be exposing yourselves to great dangers in this work. The journeys will be long and difficult. You are young to face such privations as are normal for us *frailes*. There may not always be sufficient food. However, hunger and cold and illness are not the greatest risks. You well know the fanatic devotion of many Mexicans to their ancient gods which we recognize for what they are — demons. It is possible, even probable, that your labor for the true religion of the one God will give rise to hatred among the more barbarous or bigoted of your people. I ask that you consider well before you determine to place yourselves in danger of their wrath. Human life has small value to these heathens, for are they not accustomed to offer it lavishly and even joyfully to their idols, who, they believe, order them to conduct such wholesale murder? Those to whom you will be going on this mission do not yet want to know Our Lord and you are likely to find yourselves in many troubles. All your sufferings and sorrows I shall feel as deeply as though you were my own sons. I plead with you to think seriously about what you are doing!"

"We *have* considered, Father. And we *do* know many of our people to be vengeful and blood-loving, but we wish for them all the blessings of the one God, Who will bring them to peace and salvation. You have given us the privilege of an education in all that touches the Faith. How may we neglect to offer the benefits of our training to God? Yes, we are quite

*Dialogue in this chapter is adapted from Motolinía, *op. cit.*

prepared to accompany Fray Bernardino and to share all his dangers in the service of Heaven and our people."

"And if it should mean your deaths, Antonio? Think, *mi hijo*. You are the grandson of Xicotencatl, King of Tlaxcala. You are his heir. That, too, involves responsibilities. What if you never return to rule and guard your own nation?"

"Padre, would you have us refuse the gift of our lives if it should be that God has need of them? Who are we to deny Him the return of these lives He has given us? Did they not kill St. Peter? Were not St. Paul and St. Bartholomew destroyed for God? Why should we not die for the Same if it serves Him and could save the souls of others? Please, then, give us your blessing and permission to go forth with Fray Bernardino!"

The anxious Martín de Valencia studied the faces of Antonio and his friend Diego, sadly but proudly, too. They had answered him as men and Christian apostles. He had trained them to be such. Was it now his right to impede their generous impulses?

"*Muy bien, mis hijos*," he said at last. "You shall have my blessing. But I hope, Antonio, that you plan to take along your young servant Juan. He may prove useful or even be a means of saving your lives. There is often more security in a greater number. If you fall into danger, Juan might serve as a messenger to notify those of us who love you."

"*Mil gracias, Padre*. Yes, I shall take Juan with us. Have no fear, my Father. It is for Our Lord that we go and this makes us very happy. If we should have to die for Him, will not He grant us His great mercy?"

* * *

So Antonio, the noble heir to the Tlaxcalan throne, his young friend Diego, and the devoted servant Juan, set out from

the monastery of the Franciscans in the company of Father Bernardino Minaya. In due course, they arrived at Tepeaca. Since there was no monastery at Tepeaca, after a short stop they went on to the town of Huejotzingo. This was already a famous Franciscan center but, even so, it was also the head of a Province still largely populated by unredeemed pagans who privately worshiped numerous idols in defiance of the laws that prohibited such practices.

Fray Bernardino and the Dominicans shared the revulsion that had assailed Fray Martín when he learned that these things could be. They saw it as their duty to search out and destroy the ugly idols wherever this was possible. Since native boys might locate the places where the idols were concealed more easily than the most energetic priests could, it seems that Antonio and Diego were now encouraged by Fray Bernardino to hunt for the forbidden altars. This task they undertook with enthusiastic zeal. They knew that as long as the Indians had access to the old gods and maintained the fantastic, familiar religious rites, they were far less likely to be attracted to the true religion, which did not give free reign to their natural love of sensationalism and violence. In their barbarism the Indians were closely attached to the bloody sacrifices which they wished to believe were demanded by their deities.

For the first two or three days of their labor in Huejotzingo, Antonio and Diego busily searched out the proscribed idols. They were successful in locating several and these they brought in for the missionaries to destroy. Elated by their accomplishment, they then departed for other towns to repeat this work, Antonio commencing his search with the aid of his little *mozo* Juan, at a settlement which the Spaniards had named Orduña. Finding the idols was easy; and Antonio promptly took possession of them. Though he was not molested at Orduña, the chiefs of the place were making plans to kill these boys. All unsuspecting, Antonio led Juan on to another town called

Cuahtinchan, where they were sure to find more idols. There he entered a house which had been left unguarded save only for a small lad posted at the door, with whom Antonio left Juan.

Very soon two Indians appeared. They were carrying large clubs and without uttering a word they commenced to beat Juan. The commotion brought his young master quickly back to the door in protest.

"Why do you wish to kill my companion who is not to blame for any of this? It is I who am to blame — I am the one who is seizing your idols that they may be destroyed. They are not gods at all but devils! However, if it is for them that you are doing this violence to an innocent child — here, take them and leave him alone!" And with these words, Antonio threw down the idol he had in his hands.

But the words and action of Xicotencatl's grandson by no means appeased the Indians who had attacked Juan. Still guarding their silence, they proceeded to beat him to death, after which they turned on his valiant young master and ruthlessly killed him in the same fashion. When night had fallen, the broken bodies of the dead lads were carried to a deep *barranca* near the town of Orduña and thrown where it seemed that they would be safe from discovery, or where at least the blame might fall on others.

The alarm was soon raised when Antonio and Juan failed to return and the Dominicans, headed by Fray Bernardino, organized an investigation which eventually resulted in the apprehension and hanging of the murderers. All this did not, of course, save the lives of the brave Antonio and his little servant, but a strange result of the tragedy was the fact that, before the hanging, the killers willingly confessed, detailing their encounter with the lads and their crime, after which they asked for baptism. Who can understand the intentions of Almighty God? Perhaps this episode, beginning with a mere boy's bravery and ending with the final remorse of the mur-

derers, was the stimulus for many future conversions among the people of Orduña and Cuauhtinchan. At the moment, of course, none of this could assuage the grief of Fray Martín, who received the shocking news with profound sorrow. He had truly loved these children as greatly as any man might love his own sons! But there was comfort of a sort in recalling the courageous logic of those farewell words of Antonio: "Were not St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Bartholomew killed? Well, then, if they are to kill us, will not God grant us His great mercy?" But often, as he remembered these words of his martyred student, Fray Martín did so with tears in his eyes.

Many times the diligent Fray Martín was to say that if the *frailes* had paved the way for the prelates in New Spain, just so had the Christian children of the Indians served the cause of the *frailes*. But he was never content to leave the more dangerous work to the boys he taught. Perhaps the martyrdom of Antonio and Juan would prove a blessing to the cause of American conversion, but such tragedies were not to be welcomed. Aside from the fact that he loved his neophytes and wanted to protect them from danger, even more good would result from the example of their pious, long lives and the teachings they could impart to others. Though he never overcame his horror at the continuance of pagan worship in some places, he usually took pains to attack these abuses personally. On one occasion, although ill and aged, he became so offended by the ribald sounds of the dance drums and drunken shrieks of certain Tlaxcalans on a mountain behind the city that he set out all alone toward the spot where such insults were being offered God. He knew but too well what all the noise meant. Toiling to the top of the forest-clad height, he located the altar and tore down the goddess there enshrined. When the idolaters found it pulverized, there was little doubt as to who had committed this act, but most wisely they said nothing and the incident was soon forgotten.

It is likely that by now Fray Martín realized that he had been a little too hard on Pedro de Gante and his companions on the occasion of his arrival at Texcoco. Several years had now passed and there were ever more *frailes* to instruct the heathen, but the eradication of the old customs was not even yet completed. His beloved and zealous Motolinía had had something to say on this matter when later churchmen had criticized the friars for the sporadic outbreaks of pagan rites in New Spain. One could not expect the impossible. To do so seemed to Motolinía "like one who, having bought a skinny lamb and given it a piece of bread to eat, immediately commences to pinch the tail to see if it has fattened."

Martín de Valencia was to live in this vast America but ten short years, for he died near Tlalmanalco in 1534, but even during this comparatively brief time he came to know much of the Indians and to serve them well. Though his health was never good, he spared no effort to instruct them and be an example of piety to them. For several seasons before his death, he made it a custom to fast and pray at the sanctuary cave on the heights of El Sacromonte, a wooded hill overlooking the town of Amecameca. Persistent legend has it that there he was always surrounded by enormous flocks of birds whose musical singing and friendly chirping comforted him during his meditations. This seemed most unusual to the Amecamecans, for it was observed that birds in such numbers were never to be seen on El Sacromonte save only when Fray Martín was present. And it is also noted in many histories that after he died, the birds never again returned. Several religious of his own time also asserted that it was in the little hermitage still to be found on El Sacromonte that Fray Martín was blessed with an apparition of St. Francis and St. Anthony!

Each of the great Franciscan missionaries left his individual mark on American history; each figure used his God-given talents for the Christianization of the appallingly bloodthirsty

pagans. We cannot know, even from their works, which of these holy men were saints. In a company of such brilliant apostles as Pedro de Gante, Motolinía and Juan de Zumárraga, perhaps the few years during which Fray Martín de Valencia served God in New Spain as the director of religious, may not seem to present him as the most spectacular or even the most outstandingly successful. But a man whose daily life is distinguished by supernatural happenings must take a place uniquely his own in the record of any land or epoch!



IV. THE FIGHTING FIRST BISHOP'S REWARD

ALL through the long period when New Spain was a mission territory, the Indians were to know no better friends than the men of St. Francis, and one of these was their first Bishop. About seven years after Pedro de Gante had come to Texcoco and started his school, Fray Juan de Zumárraga arrived from Spain to establish a diocese and commence preparations for a cathedral at México City. Even today this is the largest cathedral on the American continents and everyone who visits México finds it one of the nation's most impressive sights.

Fray Juan, who had been born in the Basque country of Spain, was acting as Father Guardian of the monastery of Arojo when he first came to the attention of Charles V. From what the Emperor had seen and heard during a trip to Val-

ladolíd, he became such a strong admirer of Juan de Zumárraga that he was inspired to donate an immense sum of money to the monastery. To his surprise, the Father Guardian at first refused to accept this gift and, after he was finally persuaded to take it, he distributed the entire amount among the poor without using a penny of it for the community. From this, the King perceived the sincerity of the Franciscan and what a fine Christian spirit he had. After that, Charles consulted Fray Juan on various matters and finally, in 1527, when it was necessary to establish an Episcopal See at México City, the Emperor suggested the name of his Franciscan friend to Rome as the first Bishop of the new diocese. This was the customary procedure in those days when Church and State were closely connected in every way.

Fray Juan did not really wish to be a bishop, for he knew that in such a position he would have to devote much time to practical matters of Church government and even to civil political affairs in a new country that was just beginning to be organized. He also knew that the situation in México had recently become very complicated. This was because some of the colonists, having grown jealous of the powers and popularity of their Governor, Hernán Cortés, had made trouble by bringing accusations against him in letters to the Spanish court. The Emperor had let himself be persuaded that since the conquest was now more or less achieved, there was no great need for the services of the brilliant Captain-General and, in fact, it might be wiser to prevent so strong a man from increasing his influence any further. Inasmuch as the Indians respected and had even come to love Cortés, he certainly seemed to be in a position to take over the land he had conquered in his own right if his ambitions so inclined. Perhaps it would be tempting fate to leave him in power over the Mexicans with whom he was so popular. To Cortés' credit, however, it must be said that he never showed the slightest sign of disloyalty to his

King and country, though he must have been fully aware of possibilities that would have tempted a less noble character. Anyway, the Spanish court had decided to send a group of five men to rule its gold-flowing colony. These men would serve as the *Real Audiencia*, or Supreme Court, of New Spain. Arrived there, the *Audiencia* could investigate the charges against Cortés and judge whether any of his acts merited punishment. Fray Juan de Zumárraga realized that, as the first Bishop of México, he would likely be drawn into these troublesome matters. He desired only peace and quiet to pursue the spiritual life he had chosen when he had entered the Franciscan Order. However, upon receiving a positive command from his superior, he had to brush aside his preferences and obediently accept his nomination to this high office.

Together with being a deeply spiritual priest, it seems that Fray Juan was also a man of action. And once he understood that he must go to México, he saw no use in wasting time waiting for the arrival from Rome of the Papal Bulls necessary for his formal consecration. It was an age of slow communications and the need to bring order to the Mexican church was really pressing. The judges of the *Audiencia* were all ready to sail and he determined to go with them even though it would be simply as bishop-elect, though by a royal decree he also bore the title "Protector of the Indians." He could not foresee how this failure to have his authority confirmed by formal consecration before his departure would handicap his work in the New World.

Most unhappily, the *Real Audiencia* was dominated by Nuño de Guzmán, a figure whose name was to go down in history as the most shameful ruler México has ever known and who was, moreover, the bitter enemy of Hernán Cortés, the man whose rule he had been empowered to investigate and perhaps punish! Together with this person and his four associate judges — Parada, Maldonado, Matienzo and Delgadillo —

Fray Juan set out from Seville for America in 1528. He was already past sixty years of age and although a heavy, vigorous-looking man, he was facing difficulties that might easily have defeated one considerably younger and of more robust health.

It seems that it did not take Bishop Zumárraga long to size up the characters of his traveling companions. When, within two weeks after their arrival at the Imperial City of México, two of these, Parada and Maldonado, died, leaving only the younger pair, Matienzo and Delgadillo, to become, as it turned out, the willing henchmen of the evil Nuño de Guzmán, the Bishop wrote back to the court of Spain: "I am very sure that so far as the well-being and tranquillity of this land are concerned, it was a great pity that God permitted the deaths of the first two and spared the lives of the others."

Guzmán was enraged to learn that Hernán Cortés had stolen a march on him and had departed for Spain before the arrival of the *Audiencia* to place his side of the Mexican quarrel before his sovereign. But he satisfied his vengeance by immediately seizing Cortés' property. When this action brought protests from Cortés' many followers and friends, they too found themselves unceremoniously stripped of their possessions and their persons subjected to various forms of persecution. Pedro de Alvarado, the Conqueror's first lieutenant from the beginning of the Conquest, lost everything he owned right down to his saddle mule!

Everyone soon saw the viciousness of the power-mad and shameless Guzmán, who did not stop at ruining his rivals and equals. Against all law, he commenced a savage enslavement of the Indians. When they rebelled against his ruthless and criminal acts, he retaliated with terrorizing punishments. He massacred defiant Indians and laid waste great sections of the land, driving many converted natives from the towns where the missionaries had been working so hard to instruct them and bring them the benefits of peace and co-operative industry.

The priests and Brothers were aghast and so, of course, was the new Bishop. Among all the records and histories of México, not one good word can be found for this arch-fiend Nuño de Guzmán.

Naturally many reports of these goings-on were dispatched to the Emperor, but few of them were delivered since Guzmán soon arranged to have the mail intercepted. After he had read what the outraged colonists and religious had to say about him, he destroyed the letters and turned his fantastic anger against the writers. Even then he was not satisfied. As previously when he had been Governor of Pánuco in New Spain and had extorted and killed until that territory had been reduced to desert, so now Guzmán launched the same sort of program against the rich central provinces. He and his men took everything they desired from all, irrespective of who they might be. At will, they broke into convent schools to carry off the girl students. They considered nothing but their own infamous desires and there seemed to be no end to their greed and violence.

In the lovely Tarascan lake country of Michoacán, the Indian King Caltzonzín (who had been a friend of Hernán Cortés and had become a Christian, pledging his fealty to the Spanish Emperor) was soon to be tortured to death by Guzmán's orders in an attempt to make him give up the great treasure he was supposed to hold. His subjects, many of whom had been baptized after abandoning their pagan gods, were to turn bitterly from Christianity and run off to the mountain fastnesses, there to relapse into barbarism while nursing their hatred of the white man. Among the afflicted Tarascans who could not escape in this way, there was to be a horrifying wave of suicides.

One may well imagine what a terrible experience it was for Bishop Zumárraga to have to watch all this and to be almost powerless to bring these frightful men of his own race to order

and decency. Although he bore the title "Protector of the Indians," and by virtue of this was supposed to have some rights over Indian affairs, he now lamented the informality that had failed to secure an official written definition of his authority from the throne. The Guzmán party pretended to believe that "Protector of the Indians" was merely an honorary title, ridiculed the idea that it carried any legal power, and refused to accept the Bishop's counsels and warnings against their abuses of the natives. It was a thoroughly miserable and baffling situation, in which the land was at the mercy of confirmed criminals. When Fray Juan had wished to decline the episcopal honors to follow the peaceful monastic life in Spain, he had little dreamed that anything could be as bad as this assignment had turned out!

Nevertheless, he took all possible action in defense of the Indians, who, knowing him for their friend, constantly came to him with their woes. There was such a multitude of these applicants that it became necessary for the Bishop to appoint a number of inspectors and judges to investigate and pass upon the complaints. This resulted in many deserved penalties against the oppressors, who, under his order, could thereafter appeal only to him and *not* to the *Audiencia*. But as might be expected, that body did not look upon Fray Juan's activities with favor, and matters went from bad to worse. It was repeatedly thrown up to him that he was really not even a bishop inasmuch as he had not yet been consecrated and so, they declared, had no more power than the humblest friar. And sometimes colonists under penalties from his judges lodged their own complaints against their Bishop with the *Audiencia*.

At last he was informed that beyond teaching religion to the Indians, he must assume no jurisdiction whatever. If he did not cease exercising his offices, they said, he would be deprived of his income and banished from the country. Spaniards were prohibited from consulting him on their relations

with the natives and the Indians who appealed to him were to be killed. The Bishop's frequent suggestions that he and the *Audiencia* meet to study the subject of the responsibilities and rights assigned him by their Emperor, were rejected.

* * *

Such iniquity being by now an established order in the land, Bishop Zumárraga decided there was no recourse but to denounce the evildoers from the pulpits of the city. The sermons of many of his priests firmly condemned the abuses of the lawless colonists and their more lawless governors. This was met by the angry judges with the circulation of a shameful and scandalous attack upon the Bishop and his friars in which they were accused of abominable sins. There was nothing for the Franciscans to do but to defend themselves publicly.

At a Mass solemnized by the Bishop of Tlaxcala on the Feast of Pentecost, Fray Antonio Ortíz had just commenced to preach a sermon denouncing these wicked lies when Nuño de Guzmán, who was present in the church, rudely shouted that the Franciscan must speak of other subjects or leave the pulpit! This not having the desired effect, Delgadillo gave orders for Fray Antonio to be pulled out of the pulpit by force. After this scandal, those responsible for the disturbance were forthwith excommunicated. But even this did little to help the situation of the poor Indians or to stop the villainy of the first *Audiencia*.

Knowing that his reports of all these things written to the court of Spain were being intercepted against the express order of the Emperor, Bishop Zumárraga wracked his brains for a way to get his letters past Guzmán's censors. And at last he saw a cause for hope. This came about after Nuño de Guzmán learned to his dismay that Hernán Cortés was receiving many favors at the Spanish court. Evidently he had completely

cleared himself of the charges that had been made against him. Acting speedily to try to prevent the great conqueror's return to México, Guzmán now sent a picked commission of his partisans to Europe with still new complaints of Cortés. Just as soon as this group had sailed and the Bishop found himself free of many of the spies who had been reporting his movements to Guzmán, he set out personally for Veracruz to see whether he could not get a letter safely on its way to the Empress. At first it looked discouraging because the port officials flatly refused to pass anything without previous censorship. But one day the Bishop saw a man whose honest face gave him hope.

"You say you are a sailor on the royal galleon now preparing to weigh anchor for Spain?" he asked quietly, searching the rough but open countenance of the man who stood before him in the uneven light of the sputtering candles on the table.

"*Sí, Ilustrísimo*, I am a seaman and we leave tomorrow. It is not my first voyage to New Spain and return, which is how I know so well this port of Veracruz."

The habited figure with the large face and somewhat heavy features sighed and stirred slightly as he sat in the massive, leather-backed chair beside the table. But for the authority glowing in his keen dark eyes, he might have seemed the plainest friar in New Spain. The wavering taper flames revealed his tonsure and the coarse cloth of his habit. "Then you may have heard how closely the outgoing mails are watched by the censors of Nuño de Guzmán, my son?"

"Indeed I have, *Ilustrísimo*. Who does not know that the guilty *oidor* prohibits the passage of all letters and reports that might incriminate him at the court of our great Emperor—may God preserve him! Everyone is terrified of this madman's vengeance."

"And you, my son, how much does your sailor's heart fear the infamous dictator of New Spain?" The Bishop shot his

question abruptly as he gazed penetratingly and directly into the puzzled but candid eyes of the seaman.

"I, *Ilustrísimo*? Why, I don't know . . . I"

"Let us put it this way — how much would you dare in the service of your King? in the service of your God?"

The man's shoulders straightened unconsciously as he considered the challenge. He realized that the holy friar who had mysteriously summoned him to this meeting and who was renowned as a courageous prelate of the Church, was about to charge him with some heavy responsibility.

"I am a loyal subject of my King, and for my God I would dare everything if one of His holy bishops required it, *Ilustrísimo*."

"Well answered — very well said, indeed." Juan de Zumárraga smiled for the first time. "It is heartening to find a *man* in the midst of this poor, browbeaten multitude and a sufficient number of scoundrels. God be praised that I was not wrong when I said to myself: 'This one has the face of a man both valiant and trustworthy. I shall call him to me'!"

The sailor was breathing more quickly. He swallowed once or twice, but he did not flinch nor take his eyes from the face of the other. "What would you command me to do, my Bishop?"

"The time has come when certain matters, serious wrongs, must be made known to our sovereign rulers in Spain. It is the problem of a letter, a letter to the Empress — may the good God bless her many days. She must know and make known to the Emperor what incredible abuses their peoples here in America are being made to suffer; how their laws and their express commands are being flouted by those to whom they have given great power. Oh, I well know you cannot safely bear such a letter on your person," as an expression of doubt passed across the sailor's open countenance. "That would be a stupid and useless course. But a plan has occurred to me which

we may hope is an inspiration from Heaven. And it is a simple device really. . . .”

* * *

By noon of the following day, the last of a heavy cargo had been hoisted aboard His Majesty's galleon as it rode at anchor on the blue waters of the Gulf, its sails glinting proudly under the tropical gold of the sun. And, as the crew of intrepid sixteenth-century seamen stood by for another heroic departure for their homeland via Habana, there was one among them whose heart swelled with the knowledge that victory really *can* be to the virtuous. Only he knew the promising secret that, buried deeply and safely in the ship's hold among that cargo was a barrel of oil which could be the means of re-establishing law and justice in New Spain. For into that indistinguishable barrel of oil, he had personally slipped the block of wax within which he had helped Bishop Juan de Zumárraga seal his revealing letter to the Empress of Spain!

Thus it came about that very soon all the horror and crime of Nuño de Guzmán and the first *Audiencia* was known at the court of Charles V. The Bishop had not only recited the whole sad story of the terror in México, but in his letter had made suggestions for reforms and remedies. Above all, he had pleaded for a new *Audiencia* composed of decent and godly men. He had demanded that the first *Audiencia* be tried and punished for its brutalities and lawlessness. He had asked that his powers as "Protector of the Indians" be clearly set forth and perhaps enlarged and that it be decreed that only religious might henceforth hold final authority over these poor Indians. After all, it was the religious alone who had won the confidence of the natives of this beautiful, unhappy land. He especially recommended Fray Martín de Valencia and the Dominican Fray Domingo de Betanzos for such authority. He did

not write, he declared, from resentment that his income had been taken from him: "... since with the pastoral office, I should be so honored and esteemed, that with only my knapsack I could seek my living." And the Emperor, remembering, doubtless, how Fray Juan had refused to keep his donation for the community in Spain, giving it all to the poor, could easily believe that the Bishop spoke the truth. No, he was not concerned over the loss of his tithes, but was accusing the *Audiencia* from motives of duty, justice and love of God. Moreover, it was but loyalty to his sovereign to inform him of all these crimes for which he had found it necessary to excommunicate the participants.

It was now up to Charles V and his Council of the Indies to act — and they did. A new *Audiencia* was appointed to replace Guzmán, Matienzo and Delgadillo, to investigate the charges against them, and to punish them according to their guilt. The men who formed the second *Audiencia* were selected with a great deal more care than had been used in naming the first, and all were noted for their honor and ability. Perhaps the most famous name among them was that of the great Don Vasco de Quiroga, who would one day be made Bishop of Michoacán. But at this time Don Vasco was a lawyer and had no idea that he would ever be a churchman.

Meanwhile, in that same Tarascan country of Michoacán some two hundred and fifty miles west of México City, Nuño de Guzmán was madly extending his work of pillage and torture. It seems that he must have suspected that somehow Bishop Zumárraga had succeeded in getting a report of his behavior out of México; and he had also heard that Hernán Cortés had been vindicated at the Spanish court and was already on his way back, loaded with new honors even if not bearing his old title of Governor. All this was bound to bring about trouble and punishment for Guzmán. So, after enforcing the enlistment of Cortés' old captains and ten thousand Indians,

he had set out on a new campaign against the Tarascans. This would at least for a time keep him out of reach of the justice that was on its way to the Mexican capital by order of his King!

The two other guilty judges of the first *Audiencia*, Matienzo and Delgadillo, were also continuing in their evil ways, though they, too, must have realized that their days in power were now numbered. Of course, they had in their own behalf sent many accusations against Bishop Zumárraga to the King. According to their lies, the Bishop had unduly interfered with their "administration of justice," had incited the Indians to rebellion, and had unfairly launched an interdict against the city, depriving it of the consolations and benefits of the Sacraments. But they could hardly have believed that their words would avail to save them.

After the arrival of the second *Audiencia* and its vigorous prosecution of Matienzo, Delgadillo and — even in his absence — Nuño Guzmán, the Bishop left for Spain to ask that his sovereign examine his conduct in the light of how it had been described and distorted by the first *Audiencia*. Delgadillo, who had already been sent home to Spain for punishment, tried to revenge himself by facing the Bishop and personally repeating his charges, but Fray Juan de Zumárraga was completely exonerated and in 1533 was finally consecrated Bishop of México, the high office he had already filled for five strife-torn years.

Back again in México, the great prelate was to find a measure of peace in which to organize his diocese, build schools and colleges, and, at a later date, to collaborate with the first Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, in the establishment of the New World's first printing press. On this, he would publish the books which were to be such a splendid aid to the missionaries in the Christian instruction of the Indians. He would encourage in every way such heroic teachers as Pedro de Gante, Martín de Valencia and Motolinía in the enlargement of their

institutions and the foundation of new ones. Through the years, the Bishop had become a fighter and he came to look upon his clergy as a great spiritual army in combat for the glory of Jesus Christ. On his return from Spain in 1534, he brought with him, besides new clerical recruits for that army, many skilled artisans and their families, as well as six women to teach the Indian girls. And before long, some Indians and *mestizos*, as the persons of mixed Indian and Spanish blood were called, began to seek and receive ordination in the four minor orders of the Church.

His many fine works were to earn Juan de Zumárraga the approval and praise of his Emperor, and after the terrible troubles and humiliations of his first years in México this was a just reward. However, even before his consecration or the trip to Spain, a far more particular blessing had been granted him by Heaven, a blessing for which he was able to praise God during his last seventeen years of earthly life!

* * *

The chill December day was drawing to a close. Fray Juan was in his study at the Bishop's palace. He had spent a long afternoon presiding over a number of important conferences and he was tired. But he was grateful that at last he was permitted to work for his diocese in peace now that the second *Audiencia* had put an end to Guzmán's tyranny. This was during the year 1531, which he had devoted to catching up with many vital matters so badly impeded in the earlier confusion and which must be concluded before the trip to Spain. However, exhausted as he was, he was relieved that this afternoon's work at least was done. But perhaps it wasn't. He looked up inquiringly as the door to the antechamber opened after a discreet knock. The Bishop's secretary entered quietly.

"*Ilustrísimo*," he commenced hesitantly, "that Indian is still outside. He was told that later, perhaps, you might be able to hear him. But you are weary. Shall I send him off? It is probably nothing of importance."

Fray Juan rose from his seat and took the few steps to a barred window overlooking the street. It was a rough, dirt-surfaced street from which the late afternoon sun had withdrawn its rays. The crowds which animated it by day were already dispersing. Honest men did little circulating in the unlighted Mexican thoroughfares after nightfall in the sixteenth century. There was nothing to see out there, and he turned back to the room. "Oh, yes, the Indian. I had completely forgotten him, and I fear he has had a long wait. Why was it, again, that he wished to see me?"

The priest-secretary coughed lightly to cover his embarrassment. "It is something about a message. He imagines that he bears a message for the illustrious Bishop of México from the Blessed Virgin! It is my belief that he may be a trifle wrong in the head. Just give me the word, Your Excellency, and I shall dismiss him."

"It is late for that now, Father, since he has spent practically the whole day in the waiting room. No, you had best bring him in."

"As Your Excellency wishes, then. But I shall have some of the others accompany us. The poor thing may not be rational."

"Did you hear his name?"

"I believe his Indian name is Quauhtatohua, but he declares that he was baptized Juan Diego."

"Very well. No matter. Just show this Juan Diego in, that we may hear him as quickly as possible. It grows late."

"*Muy bien, Ilustrísimo*."

There seemed to be little to distinguish Juan Diego from any other poor native. He was small and brown and he shuf-

fled his bare feet slightly in embarrassment. From his uncovered head, a shock of coarse black hair bristled in disorder. About his shoulders against the after-sunset chill was drawn the *tilma*, a typical Indian cloak made from a sort of roughly woven sacking that it was customary for the *haciendas* to issue to their laborers. Although actually middle aged, he appeared, as many of these Indians did, of indeterminable years.

Bishop Zumárraga had reseated himself in the big chair he preferred for his conferences. The corners of the large room were becoming dim, since it lacked only a little of the hour for the boy to come who was charged with lighting the candles. But the Bishop could discern the faces of several habited figures who had followed Juan Diego from the ante-chamber. Evidently the secretary had really looked upon this visitor with a mistrustful eye. For a moment, all were silent. Though he had persisted in spending the afternoon squatting in a corner of the waiting room on the stone floor, Juan Diego did not seem to know how to begin the story he so greatly desired to tell. It was His Excellency who broke the awkwardness.

"Yes, little son? You have something to say to me?"

The Indian shivered slightly and then lunged forward on short, jerky steps to fall on his knees before Fray Juan. As he gazed up into the honored face above him, his eyes were filled with an eloquence that belied the dumbness of his tongue. At last, encouraged by a kindly smile, he recovered his faculty of speech.

"Holy Father — *Ilustrísimo* — it is that I — I mean, I was sent by our most Blessed Mother. For myself, Juan Diego, I would never have dared to come here to molest one so great and so occupied with the holy affairs of Our Lord. But she said it, holy Father, that I *must not fail* to come to you only!"

Fray Juan glanced questioningly at the religious standing behind the kneeling figure. It was plainly evident that they were all incredulous. They were merely awaiting some ges-

ture from him as a sign to break up this unseemly, rather ridiculous interview. The Bishop's gaze shifted back to the crouching Indian.

"Very well, my son, very well. But let us not delay. What is it that you believe the Holy Virgin charged you to make known to me?"

"*Gracias*, my little Bishop. It is that she wishes and demands that a church be built in her honor on that very spot where she accosted me this morning. In her beautiful blue robe and with heavenly music playing all about her, she told me this. She said, 'Juan Diego, my little son, you must go at once to your great Bishop in México and tell him my desire. It is that he must raise a shrine right here in my honor.' Oh, I knew well, and I said it, that she should have asked one worthier than I and with a proper influence to serve her in this matter. But she would not listen. 'I know what I ask, Juan Diegito, my least son, and whom I ask. It is this humble son of mine precisely who must bear my message to His Excellency.' For this it was that I came running in fear and with a great reluctance."

"I see," temporized Bishop Zumárraga, though he really did not see beyond the fact that the modest little *peón* was entirely sincere in his conviction that the Virgin had sent him. "And which is this place where you think our Holy Mother desires her shrine?"

"Oh, but right where she stood, *Ilustrísimo* — on the hill of Tepeyacac* over which I was passing on my way to the class of *la doctrina* at Tlatelolco. My own house is not far distant from there, where I reside with my uncle, Juan Bernardino. Taking my way across. . . ."

"All right, all right, Juanito, at Tepeyacac, you say. That is an open place and almost uninhabited. It would be a strange site for Our Lady's temple, no?"

*The place was called Tepeyacac at that time; it is now known as Tepeyac.

"But that is where she wishes it, *Ilustrísimo*; precisely she said it: 'Here I shall hear their laments and remedy their miseries, woes and pains.'* I am very sure — "

"*Si, mi hijo — pues*, come back another time and I will hear you more slowly. Then I shall examine this matter from the beginning and consider the will and desire which have brought you here."**

The Indian shook his head sadly, perhaps realizing that it was too much to expect that the great man might take him seriously. Indeed, this was what he had anticipated from the moment that the frighteningly exquisite Vision had made him her messenger.

"How might I have disobeyed our Holy Virgin after she had so graciously revealed herself to me, telling me furthermore exactly who it was who addressed me? *Ay!* I was very afraid, Excellency, but I wished so much to please her — to serve her."

"Of course, of course," the Bishop answered soothingly. There was no mistaking the conviction and agitation of this humble fellow nor the fact that his intrusion had cost him considerable pain. Obviously he was quite desperate that his reasons be understood — and believed. "But you must go now. If this occurrence has been imaginary, we shall not judge you harshly for having permitted yourself to believe. And if later you still think it necessary, you may return. Go now, and God bless you."

As Juan Diego stumbled blindly from the room in his failure, the Bishop rose to his feet. When the door had closed behind the trembling figure, Fray Juan studied the expressions of the attendants who remained behind. Their open skepticism clearly showed what *they* thought. And maybe their

*Words of the Virgin are translated from Valeriano's *Relación*, which is quoted by Velázquez in *La Historia Original Guadalupeana* (México, D. F., 1945), p. 6.

**Translated from Velázquez, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Bishop felt some slight annoyance that it was such an easy skepticism. The old prelate felt more weary than before. It *had* been a long, complicated afternoon!

The next day Juan Diego was back, as fearful as before but just as insistent. He had beheld the Virgin again, and again she had demanded that he make her wish known to the Bishop. True to his promise, Fray Juan de Zumárraga spoke to the Indian at greater length on this occasion, but still was not convinced.

"But you must know, my son, that I surely should have been given a sign by Our Lady if she really desires me to erect a church 'way out there on the hill of Tepeyacac."

"*Señor*, what must this sign be, that I may go and ask it of the Heavenly Lady?"*

To this plea the prelate made no answer and once more the baffled Juan Diego was forced to withdraw, a failure. As for Fray Juan, he realized that this was all exceedingly odd, though the palace attendants explained it easily enough. This Indian was simply out of his mind! Perhaps their assurance in so stating irritated Juan de Zumárraga although he could by no means label their doubt as unreasonable. However, there were things in this life more difficult to deal with than the blind faith of some children and Indians. They *were* children, these Indians over whom he had been appointed to watch by God Himself! There was no possible question of the sincerity of this one. Did not children sometimes see that which was hidden from the wise? Suddenly the Bishop made a decision. "It may well be that you are all right in your judgment of this Juan Diego," he said, "but anyway it is not fitting that we permit ourselves to be negligent in such a concern. So please send two trustworthy men to follow him. I would know where he goes, and what will happen to him now."

**Ibid.*, p. 8.

It was an order from their Bishop, and the other missionaries concealed their amusement as best they could, while filing obediently from his presence to carry out his request.

The next morning there was a certain amount of excitement when the men who had been sent out to follow Juan Diego and report on his movements returned to the Bishop's residence to relate a strange story. They had had no trouble in overtaking the Indian, they said, for he had headed directly home along the well-traveled road to the north of the capital, a road that is still in our day the highway to Tepeyac and to the town that has grown up about the foot of the historic hill that is most commonly known as La Villa de Guadalupe. As there were others making their way from the city by means of this *camino*, the men were certain that Juan Diego could have had no idea that he was being shadowed. For quite a distance, he had trudged along ahead of them and then, at a spot where there was a small stream to cross, they had entirely lost him in one instant! It seemed unbelievable because the very moment they became aware of his disappearance they had run quickly to the bank of the little brook on which he had been standing a second before. Their vision was perfectly clear in all directions, and no man could have run fast enough to disappear completely in such a short time. The water of the brook was much too shallow to have covered him or carried him away. There were but very few and very small bushes anywhere about, and they had scoured the location diligently. But there had been no trace of Juan Diego! Though they felt foolish to say so, the men had to admit that they were convinced that the poor Indian had simply disappeared into thin air!

The priests to whom they reported their story very likely concluded that the men had been careless in the discharge of their duty, not bothering to watch their subject closely enough. But nothing caused either of them to change the account by one iota; and they did seem to be highly excited by their mys-

terious experience. All this was duly reported to Bishop Zumárraga, who had little to say. Perhaps this was the last that would ever be heard of the affair, or of Juan Diego. Even so, there *had* been something most unusual in his glowing black eyes as they had pleaded with the Bishop to believe the strange story.

But whatever had happened to Juan Diego, two days later he might have been clearly observed making his way gingerly about the hill of Tepeyacac. Although now his mind was largely occupied with the new worry of Uncle Juan Bernardino's desperate illness — he was at the moment on the way to call the priest for him — he could not forget the strange and disquieting experiences he had recently known near this place. For Juan had seen Our Lady a third time, immediately following his second interview with the prelate, and she had agreed to give him the required sign, instructing him to return to Tepeyacac the next morning and receive it. But then had come his uncle's illness and Juan had felt forced to disobey his Lady in order to spend the day seeking and fetching a doctor, although it had been too late for medicine to help the afflicted old man. And now Juan knew that he really *must* hurry to find the padre if Uncle Juan Bernardino was not to be left to die deprived of the Last Sacraments. In his need, and partly because of the deep chagrin he felt for having failed the Mother of God in the mission with which she charged him, he now chose a different path about Tepeyacac. In his simplicity he thought that in this way he might avoid being seen and delayed by the Queen of Heaven!

Anyway, his precautions were useless. For once again Juan Diego heard clearly the sweet ringing voice he had been dreading. And, sure enough, there before him, right in the narrow path, stood Our Lady, just as before! When she chided him gently for trying to avoid her, he painfully explained all about Juan Bernardino's urgent need of a priest; but, also as before,

he could not free himself of the spell of her words and so he believed her when she told him that his relative was already cured, which made calling the padre unnecessary. He must now go promptly to the Bishop, with the sign she would give him. She then told her "dear, smallest son" to climb the hill and bring back to her the Castilian roses he would find there. Juan was now past objecting to anything, although it must have occurred to him that this was neither the season nor the place for rose gardens. But when he had climbed to the top of Tepeyacac, there they were, growing in profusion. He dutifully picked the blooms and carried them back to her as she had ordered. She took them in her arms for a moment and then returned them to Juan, telling him to bear them in his *tilma* to Bishop Zumárraga immediately, that no more time might be lost!

* * *

Thus it had come about that the greatest blessing of Fray Juan's life was intimately shared with one of the Indians for whom he had left the peaceful monastic life in Spain, whom he had crossed the wide sea to serve as "Protector" — an Indian whose name was the same as his own, Juan! For, when the amazed attendants at the palace again saw Juan Diego standing before them, this time clutching in his arms some object folded within his *tilma*, their curiosity was very great and as soon as they had glimpsed the unseasonable roses through the opening of the cloak, they lost no time in announcing him to the Bishop. And when in his triumph, Juan had hastily unfurled the *tilma* to show the flowers to the prelate — roses gathered from the arid, rock- and cactus-strewn hilltop — all were momentarily overcome to see imprinted ineradicably on the rough, burlap-type material of the mantle, the beautifully smooth, delicately tinted image of Our Lady of Guadalupe —

just as she had appeared to her "dear, least son" there on the hill of Tepeyacac, and clothed exactly according to his description to the Bishop three days previously! There was no room now for doubts or questions. The Lovely Apparition had been seen by Juan Diego alone, but her image would be an eternal reminder and proof of the fact for all New Spain and, in time, for all the world.

The Bishop placed the image reverently in his chapel, and the following day his whole household journeyed out to view the spot where the Virgin had stood before the simple Indian and where now her shrine must be built. Passing on to the hut of Uncle Juan Bernardino, no one was surprised to find that the old man had indeed completely recovered from his illness as Our Lady had declared, or that Juan Bernardino had also beheld the same Vision and received the same instructions regarding the erection of the shrine.

And so there came to America the greatest and most powerful devotion the New World has ever known and which would be forever centered at the hill of Tepeyac, where the original shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe would in time be replaced by the rich and massive basilica toward which millions of pilgrims each year still follow the route of Juan Diego to visit and pray to *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*! Who would say that Bishop Zumárraga's privilege in being the means of establishing this magnificent devotion to our holy Mother was not the greatest blessing any man could be granted and the best reward for his long life of service?

After he had been to Spain for his consecration and had returned, Juan de Zumárraga developed the splendid works related earlier, living out his long, full life caring for his Indians, strengthening his diocese, and praying to Our Lady of Guadalupe that she might ever protect the humble, pious people to whom she had come personally through Juan Diego. So devoted a bishop was Fray Juan that even when well into

his eighties he found the strength to confirm in one single forty-day period more than 400,000 persons! And, in 1546, Pope Paul III declared México a Metropolitan See and announced that Fray Juan would be named its first Archbishop.

When he received this news (unofficially, for the Bulls had not yet arrived in México) the Bishop was in Ocuituco on a tour of Confirmation. Realizing how heavily his many years were pressing and that his strength was lessening daily, he hurried to México City to talk the matter over with his advisers, for he had remained a very humble man. And then, although everyone declared he must surely accept the new honor, he still thought he should seek the counsel of his beloved confessor, Fray Domingo de Betanzos, now living in the Dominican monastery at Tepetlaoztoc. There, the newly appointed Archbishop became really ill and Fray Domingo brought him back to the capital.

To the Emperor, Fray Juan wrote a final letter in which he said: "I die very poor, but very happy." Then, having arranged all his affairs and received the Last Sacraments, he did die on June 3, 1548, breathing the words, "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." His twenty years' labor for the Christian conversion and social uplift of America had been wonderfully influential in bringing about the changes that had carried its peoples from the terror of Nuño de Guzmán into a new peace and a period of real opportunity.



V. THE FIRST AMERICAN REPUBLICS

WE HAVE said that Don Vasco de Quiroga was one of the judges appointed by Charles V to the second *Audiencia* of New Spain. It was owing to the fine characters and abilities of this learned lawyer and the men who served with him in the new government of the colony that matters rapidly improved both for the Indians and for the Spaniards of good will. The villainous first *Audiencia* was charged with its crimes and properly tried by the second without delay. Thereafter, the culprits were returned to Spain for their well-merited punishments. When this had been done, the next step was to see how the injuries they had inflicted upon the Indians (which had resulted in many cases in their lapse into a barbarism worse than that in which the first conquerors had found them) might be repaired. As we know, the worst conditions in America had been created by the ruthless violence of Nuño de Guzmán and his soldiers in the Tarascan lake country of Michoacán.

This was particularly unfortunate because of all the Mexican tribes the Tarascans of Michoacán had been among the easiest for the first missionaries to win. Their King, Caltzontzín, had become a Christian, taking the name of Francisco, as soon as he had become acquainted with St. Francis' friars and understood the superiority of the civilization and the religion they had brought from Europe to the endless wars and barbaric practices of his own people and their pagan neighbors. And, when Caltzontzín welcomed the Franciscans to Michoacán in 1526, his Tarascans had quickly shown their good faith, of their own accord bringing in their idols for burning. In hundreds of cases they had abandoned the practice of polygamy, had been baptized, and had married under the law of the Church. But no sooner had they done so than their good nature and willingness to accept Christianity had been so badly

abused by Guzmán's brutality that they had even lost their very popular King. Caltzontzín had been tortured by the Spanish soldiers, dragged behind a horse until nearly dead, and then burned alive! Since all the Spaniards claimed to be Christians, it was natural that this crime and the many wrongs which followed had disillusioned the Tarascans and aroused their bitter hatred for all Europeans and for the Christian religion. Things were soon so frightfully bad in Michoacán that most of the good early work of the Franciscans had been destroyed. And the task of winning back hearts that have been deceived is always much harder than making conversions in the first place.

From the moment of his arrival in México, lawyer Don Vasco de Quiroga had interested himself in the welfare of the Indians. He had found the time, aside from his regular duties and at his own expense, to build a large Indian hospital and community center just outside the capital. He called this settlement Santa Fé. He soon had things so well organized at Santa Fé that 30,000 natives flocked to the place, quite content to settle peacefully under Don Vasco's protection and to receive Christian instruction. Such a work of piety made a strong impression on the better-hearted colonists, and one result was that the *Audiencia* now asked Don Vasco to go to Michoacán and see what he could learn of the sad condition of that place and what he would suggest for its rehabilitation. Therefore, in 1533, this famous *oidor*, or judge, left for the distant Province with a small group of assistants. In due time, they arrived at the poor Convento de Santa Ana* near the Tarascan capital, Tzintzuntzán, where the Franciscans were still struggling to hold a few of their earliest converts.

Being a man of long legal study and experience, the sixty-three year old Don Vasco naturally set about his proceedings

*Monasteries were interchangeably called *conventos*.

in a precise and orderly manner. He immediately called a meeting of the chief Indians of Tzintzuntzán, to whom, with the help of the Franciscans who already knew their language, he explained why he had come — to investigate their just complaints and to restore Christian decency to Michoacán. Although they had been so sorely deceived by some of the Spaniards, the natives took heart as soon as they saw that Don Vasco meant what he said; and this was clear enough when his first judicial acts were the prosecution and punishment of the white men who had been taking advantage of the lawless confusion to profit at the expense of the Tarascans. The illegal tributes or taxes that were being demanded of the Indians and all the irregularities that had been imposed in matters of Indian labor, were abolished. All matters between the colonists and Tarascans were adjusted to conform with the laws Spain had long since written for the protection of the natives.

At the same time, Don Vasco made it perfectly plain that one of his chief motives was the re-establishment of Christianity and that he intended to win the tribesmen back from their idolatrous and polygamous life. His first important success was with the Indian governor of Tzintzuntzán, Don Pedro Guangua, who gave up his extra wives and married the first as a Christian. After that, thousands responded to Don Vasco's urgings and came in with their children for baptism.

Thereupon, the hard-working judge repeated his earlier fine labor at Santa Fé, establishing another hospital of the same name two leagues outside Tzintzuntzán, where all the ill were welcomed for treatment. At the same time a big community, complete with church, schools and living quarters for the missionaries as well as dwellings for the natives, was attached to Santa Fé. The Indians took new hope and soon began pouring in from their mountain hideouts and from other nearby towns that they might participate in this improved revival of Christian life.

When the Spanish monarch had word of Don Vasco's wonderful activity, he took the new Santa Fé under his royal protection and granted it many favors. The Franciscans were put in charge of the foundation, and before long the Indians were co-operating with them to build five more hospital centers in other sections of beautiful Michoacán in order that the same high quality of work might be extended.

Don Vasco's legal mind and pious devotion turned themselves to organizing a code of regulations for these Indian communities that would protect them in every way — spiritually, morally, physically and economically. He sought to give the natives an opportunity to be self-sufficient as well as healthy and perfectly instructed Christians. So great was his wisdom that he created a state that has never been surpassed by any government in history seeking to give its citizens greater security while also encouraging individual effort through proportionate rewards. In fact, Don Vasco's hospital-towns possessed most of the good features so energetically sponsored by two entirely opposed systems we now hear so much about in our own country. Santa Fé was a welfare state to the extent that no one was permitted to suffer for lack of food, housing or medical treatment. But the form of the civil government was a republic in which the individual who worked harder or better received higher pay than the lazy or unskilled. This is how it worked:

The little Tarascan boy who had been baptized Pedro José lived at Santa Fé with his father, Miguel, his mother, María, and his two sisters. Ana was thirteen, just three years older than Pedro José, and Marta was still a little thing of four. When they had first come over to Santa Fé from their tiny, miserable hut on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro to ask the friars for baptism, María had been quite ill of an ailment which the old grandmothers had been unable to cure with their ancient herb remedies and superstitious incantations. Seeing this, the

Franciscan priest in charge had at once admitted María to the hospital, where in a few weeks she would be restored to health. To María, this fine house for the sick was a nine days' wonder. She was amazed to see it kept so clean and fresh by the Indian women of Santa Fé who took turns at this work and, under competent supervision, with the nursing.

Miguel had not wished to go back home to Pátzcuaro without his sick wife, and he had accepted the invitation to live in one of the big community houses, or *familias*, at the center. He had been assigned to a group of Tarascan farmers who were working the Santa Fé holdings. He soon found that he liked this sociable way of working. And surely it was better than eating nothing but fish and the sparse corn from his hill-side patch at Pátzcuaro! There were expert instructors at Santa Fé who knew all about a variety of crops as well as soil cultivation that helped the land produce more food. Under the tutelage of these men, Miguel went out every morning with a company of his acquaintances and friends to work in the nearby fields.

Meanwhile, Pedro José was enrolled in school, where besides mastering his catechism he promptly learned to read and write. But the thing that seemed the most fun to the little Indian was that twice each week in the afternoons his teacher took the class out to some fields which had been set aside especially for the school and there the boys were taught to be farmers, like their fathers. Each pupil was given his own little plot of ground and what he raised on it was his own crop! Like the others, Pedro José was soon the proud owner of his own *coa** and other simple garden tools which he carried to the hospital for María to see and praise. Later, when his mother had recovered, he would take his vegetables home for her to cook with Ana's aid.

*A pointed stick used by the Indians for plowing.

The housework in each of the community residences was shared by the womenfolk of the eight to twelve inhabiting families. The cost of operating the house was justly divided between the men of each unit. Right now, Ana looked after their part of the dwelling and when she had to report for her own classes in catechism, sewing and weaving, the other women living in the *familia* kept an eye out for little Marta. At Santa Fé, all the healthy grownups had to work, but for no more than six hours daily. It has only been in very recent times that our own North American laborers have worked less than ten hours a day and even now almost everyone expects to work eight hours!

Later, Miguel would be required to take his family to the more distant farms of the foundation where they would live for two years in the *familias rústicas*, since all the farmers took their turns in proper order at these remote stations. But the two years ended, they would return to Santa Fé while others replaced them, only one man and his dependents remaining for a longer period than this at each of the *familias rústicas* to teach the newcomers. But Miguel had not yet had his turn in the outlying *campos*, nor would he until María was well again.

When the first crop had been harvested and the sheep had been sheared, the proceeds were divided into three equal parts. From one third of the return each worker received enough to keep his family for a year. However, as has been said, those who had done more or better work received a larger portion than the less diligent. The second third of the income was allocated for the support of the hospital and the community, from which, of course, everyone benefited. And the last third was set aside for the poor and to guarantee against want in the event that another year should see a crop failure. The men as well as the boys owned their implements; the women and girls, their own looms and supplies for the making of clothing

and handicrafts. By turns, the women cared for the cleaning and service of the hospital and church.

When María was well again and back with her family in the *familia*, where life was so much more varied and enlivening than in a lakeside hut, she dressed in the clothing prescribed for married women at Santa Fé. Her skirt was long enough to cover the ankles and of the color of natural wool or cotton; it had few if any embellishments. She wore a head covering after the style of Spanish peasants. Young Ana dressed much the same but did not use the head covering, which was the mark of the married woman. Papa Miguel and Pedro José wore large jackets of wool or cotton and the wide, short, pleated trousers still to be seen on country Indians in Michoacán.

Everyone had the opportunity and was expected to cultivate some art or handicraft for which he had a special liking or talent. Don Vasco encouraged all such industry and self-expression, and in time it came to be the custom for each of the several hospital communities — some of which were not yet founded when Pedro José first lived at Santa Fé — to have its own specialty. This was determined upon so that there might not be so much duplication of articles as to lower the prices that could be expected from the sale of the various items. There was a wide range of crafts, which included wood-carving, lacquer work, hat weaving, metal-fashioning, pottery-making and leather-tooling. Expert teachers in each art were provided by the founder of Santa Fé at his own expense.

But beyond these wise regulations, the close supervision of Don Vasco's appointed officials and the priests ceased. Although the director of the hospital was named by him, the board of governors for the community was elected by the heads of families — usually the grandfathers. Elections were held either every year or every two years; and since no re-election of officers was permitted, everyone had a chance to par-

ticipate in the civil government of his community. If the elected managers did a poor job or failed in their obligations, they could be replaced by appointments of the rector.

Thus the ideal worked out practically so that no one had to suffer for lack of anything needed for the good life, nor was anyone excluded from representation in the regulation of public affairs; further, no one had to be bored or burdened by unrelieved routine. Though work and responsibility were shared fairly, the Tarascans were not regimented and their individualities were respected. Good organization left scope enough for everything legitimate under Don Vasco's far-sighted planning. The young Christian, Pedro José, would never be forced to run off to the hills before the thievery and persecutions of the conscienceless adventurers who had blighted the land during Miguel's young manhood; nor would he fall victim to the epidemics that killed so many Indian boys, without the assurance that he would receive the best nursing and medical care then known and practiced. He would never be hungry, he could read and write, and he was becoming, for his day, a real, scientific farmer!

Even before this revolutionary experiment in social security had reached its full development, the possibilities of Santa Fé and the other hospital establishments that were planned to follow, were fully appreciated by the *Audiencia* in México City, by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, and by the Spanish King. So it was quite logical that means should be sought to secure Don Vasco's continued presence in Michoacán and to encourage him in his work. Despite the fact that this unselfish and holy man, who had even been selling his clothes to provide for the Indians, was not an ecclesiastic, he was nominated Bishop of Michoacán in 1537; and the following year was consecrated by Bishop Zumárraga after a speedy but proper process of ordination. Actually, Don Vasco was one of the best-educated men in all New Spain. He was the possessor of a library of more

than six hundred volumes, for that time a remarkable collection. Moreover, he had made a special study of canon law and had himself written a manual for the regulation of Indian baptisms that had been approved and adopted by the Pope for the missionaries' use. Although Don Vasco was never to be a member of the Franciscan Order, he would continue through his whole career as a prelate to be closely associated with the Franciscans who had pioneered Michoacán and had already so greatly aided all his projects for the Tarascans.

In 1539, after his consecration in México, Bishop Don Vasco de Quiroga returned to Tzintzuntzán to take formal possession of his diocese and to further his missionary work among the Tarascans. Later, he decided to move his Episcopal See from Tzintzuntzán to Pátzcuaro because the latter town had been the center of the old pagan religious observance and he deemed it best to make a definite spiritual conquest of this heathen stronghold. There he commenced a new cathedral on the exact site of the ancient worship and thus, as he said, "served God where previously He had been mocked."*

Always guiding the many and varied tribes under his jurisdiction to a better temporal as well as spiritual life, he labored long years throughout his vast diocese. In time, at his invitation, the Augustinians came to Michoacán and, much later, the Jesuits; but the Franciscans remained ever the right arm of Bishop Don Vasco in his hospital and community work, in the baptizing and instruction of the tribes of Michoacán, who spoke four or five distinct languages. From the beginning the Franciscans had proved to be most proficient linguists. And they were filled with the same love for the conquered natives that had inspired Don Vasco. It was natural, then, for the new Bishop to choose St. Francis as patron of his first cathedral at Tzintzuntzán; and when prudence dictated the

*James A. Wagner, *Men of México* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce, 1942), p. 134.

move to Pátzcuaro, he regretted not being able to use the same name for the new cathedral, but it was not advisable inasmuch as there already was a Church of San Francisco in that place. Thereafter the cathedral of the diocese was El Divino Salvador. Nevertheless, in every way, Don Vasco acknowledged the debt he owed to the men of St. Francis who preceded him in Michoacán and who remained faithfully by his side.

In 1540 Bishop Quiroga established at Pátzcuaro the great Mexican college for the training of priests, San Nicolás Obispo; and to this he annexed a school for Indian lads, where a free education was supplied to the sons of all the natives who had labored in the construction of public edifices. This was Don Vasco's way of reimbursing those to whom he felt he had paid inadequate wages, for with the years he had become poorer and poorer as a result of his continuous works of charity. He also founded Santa Marta, a good school for girls of both races. In 1547, on his return voyage from a trip to Spain on Church business, he took the trouble to stop off at the island of Santo Domingo to procure five varieties of banana plants for cultivation in Michoacán. From these plantings grew the industry that now flourishes in México.

Meanwhile, he had been offered richer and far more illustrious dioceses, among them México, where Bishop Zumárraga had died; Puebla; and Segovia in Spain. But he declined any such increase in honor, wisely declaring: "To pass from one diocese to another is only to change places, not labors; for in going from one city to another the responsibility is not lightened."* All his great work for New Spain had been but his acknowledgment of the responsibility he felt the Europeans owed the conquered native populations.

Finally, in January, 1565, at the great age of ninety-five, Bishop Quiroga, after drawing up his last will and testament,

**Ibid.*, p. 140.

set out on one of his many Confirmation tours. As usual, he had scheduled his tour to include the most remote limits of his diocese, which extended from the heat of the tropics to freezing mountain heights, and across an expanse of territory more vast than that boasted by many of the larger European countries. For this immense journey, he was attended by only one assistant and a page, his portable altar being transported on muleback. By the middle of March, he had arrived as far as the town of Uruapan, where he stayed at one of the hospital foundations that had been made under his plan by Fray Juan de San Miguel. And there quite suddenly he died. The body of this selfless and holy man was carried back to Pátzcuaro for burial. When, some years later, the Episcopal See of the diocese of Michoacán was again moved, this time to the city now known as Morelia, an attempt was made to transfer the body to the newest cathedral for interment. But the Tarascans of Pátzcuaro were so indignant that the plan was abandoned. Well his Indians knew that Don Vasco's life and his substance had been offered for them and they could not let him go! And from his will, we know that he died without leaving one penny of cash that was his own — though he had come to New Spain a man of means!

The descendants of his Indians still speak of their first Bishop in tones of reverence, never failing to point out little shrines which commemorate such spots as "where Don Vasco's foot slipped in the mud," "where our holy Bishop ate," and so forth; and many are the miracles that are cited as testimony of his supernatural dedication and virtue. Certainly in no part of México have the customs and earliest training of the Indians come down to our day less changed than in Michoacán, where the famed handicraft villages clustering about lovely Lake Pátzcuaro still support themselves with the production of their individual arts-and-crafts specialties introduced so long ago by Don Vasco for the cultivation and economic betterment of this

region. Just as certainly, none of the spiritual giants of the sixteenth century is more widely venerated throughout modern México than Don Vasco de Quiroga, he who so powerfully directed the Franciscan missionaries in their organization and development of the first American republics of Michoacán.



VI. THE SAINTLY FIRST ROAD BUILDER

IT WOULD seem that in their work for Our Lord in America, the men who were or would become Franciscans were the means of initiating almost everything good in this early Christian period, even to the most practical conveniences. Their labors, of course, received the co-operation of other Orders and of certain diligent governors. Heretofore, the followers of St. Francis had built churches, schools, hospitals and even cities. Now there came from Spain a remarkably holy man who would one day be proclaimed from the altar as one of the Blessed of his Order, but who was to gain fame, even before entering religion, as the builder of México's first highways.

Thirty-one-year-old Sebastián de Aparicio had supported his poor parents as a common laborer in Spain before deciding to try to improve his fortunes in the fabled New World of which his countrymen were chattering and dreaming so ceaselessly. Sebastián was an exceedingly simple young man who either had not heard or had ignored the gleeful reports that in America there was an abundance of *free* Indian labor for al-

most anyone who could get himself across the ocean and establish himself as an *hidalgo*,* if only by virtue of his European blood. Many members of the commonest social classes at home had gone there and, through acquiring some land and a group of Indians to work it, had set themselves up as privileged persons who soon were rich enough to make their preposterous claim to be *hidalgos* "stick," as we say today.

But Sebastián de Aparicio had no ambition beyond earning by means of his accustomed toil a somewhat better life for his old father and mother. He would seek wider opportunities for the same sort of work he had done since his twentieth year — farming and animal husbandry — in the employ of others! In making this move to another continent, it had never occurred to him to aspire to the position or title of an *hidalgo*, the landed proprietor.

This being the case, he had certainly proved himself anything but a cautious or fearful man, for unless his ignorance was almost abysmal, he would have understood that with so many millions of free Indian servitors, there would likely be little gainful manual labor open to a poor white man in America. But if it had been pointed out to him that the colonists could hardly be expected to pay him for services they could demand of the natives without cost, he apparently overlooked this information. And as it turned out, he was right in following his intuition; or as some would say today he was right to "play his hunch" about going to America, though most people would have taken him for a foolhardy simpleton at the time.

In any case, if Sebastián was a guileless, uneducated youth, he was also an exceptionally honest and pious one; and God loves such men. In any age it takes courage and strong character just to *be* honest and pious in the face of the foolish mis-

**Hidalgo* means "the son of somebody"; the word originally designated only those of high birth.

judgment and ridicule of the practical, worldly people who are always in the majority. Even in an epoch when religion was held in respect by almost everyone, Sebastián's simplicity and unconcealed piety had been mistaken for stupidity by his traveling companions. To those swaggering adventurers and pretentious, ambitious ne'er-do-wells who had shipped with him, his lack of sophistication had seemed the mark of the greenest rustic. Even the common sailors had laughed at him and made him the butt of every ungracious joke they could devise. But right here the farm boy had an opportunity to prove his worth and his true love of all God's children for love of God because, instead of resenting the ridicule or permitting himself to indulge in self-pity at such grossness, he had conducted himself in so forgiving and kindly a manner toward his tormentors that little by little they had become ashamed of themselves and finally had altogether ceased trying to molest him. And, by the time the boat docked at Veracruz, there were those who admitted a belief that his prayers had been of more influence in securing their safe arrival than either the favorable winds or the skill of the ship's crew.

Unable to see an opportunity for himself in the neighborhood of the port, young Aparicio soon went on to Puebla, the city recently founded by the diligent Motolinía, for he had heard that this was the center of a rich farming district. There he worked in the fields for some two years, or until 1535 or 1536, although we do not know exactly under what circumstances. His biographers merely say that when he was not successful in gaining what he had hoped in this employment, he turned his attention to the occupation of taming young bulls and the breaking of oxen to the yoke, so that they might be prepared to pull the *carretas*, or wagons, which he was soon designing and building for a new enterprise. This was the transportation of grain and other crops to market from distant *haciendas*; as well as the carting of merchandise unloaded from

the ships putting in at Veracruz, to Puebla and México City. Wagon haulage was a new idea in America, where loads of all weights had always been borne along the wearying mountain passes by Indian *cargadores*, or porters. Long before the conquest, the Indian bearers, who called themselves *tamemes*, had been accustomed to this form of servitude.

In pre-Conquest days, there had been no beasts of burden in America, and so no other way was possible than for loads to be carried by men from place to place. This grinding labor of a whole class of the Indian society had greatly worried the first Franciscans, for to them it seemed brutal for men to have to perform this work. But for two reasons the custom had persisted under Spanish rule. First, there were no roads sufficiently wide or level to make carting an efficient undertaking or even possible in the rainy season when trails became rivers and rivers were turned into floods. Secondly, it remained cheaper in every way simply to order an Indian bound to service in return for his food, shelter and, presumably, his Christian instruction, to carry the necessary crops and merchandise. The Indians on the other hand did not offer any objections since they had been accustomed to the system from time beyond memory.

Of course, once Sebastián had his oxen and his carts in good working order, he could transport much larger loads than several *cargadores*, and furthermore he would have been far more responsible for the undamaged delivery of the goods. But he still had to overcome the obstacle of the rough and narrow trails that had sufficed for the Indian bearers. Something had to be done and he undertook to do it! With remarkable energy and fortitude he set to work to construct highways that would make his method of ox-cart haulage practical for as many as cared to use the more efficient and more humane system. Where he found the money and the time to accomplish this ambitious feat while earning his liv-

ing and sending his parents their support, is not stated in the books that have been written on his unusual life and work; but it is known that he was already a greatly respected citizen of Puebla, and it is possible that there were some among his new friends and acquaintances who gave him financial aid in this cause, by which they would all benefit in one way or another. In any case, he did open a good road from Veracruz to México City, a distance of three hundred miles; and thereafter another from the capital to Zacatecas, the chief mining district of New Spain, lying almost twice as far to the northwest of México City.

Then, constantly passing back and forth with his cargo carts over these completed highways, he continued to serve his adopted land by keeping it supplied with goods imported from Europe and by hauling Zacatecas' rich silver production back down to the capital from the north, and some of it on to Veracruz for shipment overseas.

Such hard work might have worn out any strong man in a few years. However, even in the midst of exacting labors and responsibilities for the goods in his charge, it seems that Sebastián had a surplus of energy to devote to spiritual concerns. Among these was his diligent occupation in behalf of the welfare of the savages through whose lands he passed. The Chichimecas living along the Zacatecas route were an especially ferocious pagan nation given to brutal attacks upon travelers. But they soon came to regard as a friend and benefactor this serene, fearless white man who toiled so unremittingly at work which they had not believed any white man would stoop to perform. He invariably treated them as brothers, often making them presents — coveted trinkets, generous portions of corn and even, upon occasion, oxen. Sebastián remained a very devout man despite his rough life on the roads; and he was more concerned with bringing the Faith to the savages than in securing his safety or the protec-

tion of his goods from their natural ferocity. He was one who always loved his "neighbor," and the Chichimecas were his "neighbors." No mishaps nor disappointments in the execution of his duties could disturb his habitual calm or lessen his gratitude to God for the blessings he had received. His *carreta* train served him as a sort of traveling hermitage where he prayed and cultivated his devotion almost as well as he might have done in a monastery. His example in patience and charity won many Indians to Our Lord, and nearly all whom he contacted to a better conduct and a personal friendship for himself. Many times they accompanied him for long stretches on his journeys to protect him from the hostility of other tribes.

In the midst of such arduous activity, Sebastián de Aparicio lived until his fiftieth year, 1552, contributing greatly to the development of New Spain while his own fortunes flourished. Now he considered it time to lessen the physical strains of his life, but he was hardly a man to seek retirement. Instead, he bought an *hacienda* near the City of México with his savings and, even though he no longer had any need to work, he joined his *peones* in the fields, sharing their labor, shoulder to shoulder. The crops were good and, as the profits kept rolling in he purchased a second *hacienda* and stocked it with sheep.

Both his properties soon became centers of refuge for the poor. If a man, woman or child needed anything he had, he took pleasure in supplying it. Besides caring for the destitute, he could always be counted on by his neighbors to lend them his implements, provide seed for their plantings, or aid them with the services of his Indians and beasts. Sometimes they even infringed upon his lands for their crops, but he never asked rental fees of them.

One of his innumerable recorded charities was of great advantage to a widow whose husband had died owing Sebastián a business debt. When a notary called her to his office to discuss the matter, she was hurt and angry, believing she

was to be asked for immediate payment though she had been left in poor circumstances. To her surprise, she arrived at the notary's to find her husband's creditor tearing up the notes he held for the debt, after which she was given a full receipt for the sum owed. Moreover, Sebastián promised to aid her in the needs of the three daughters who had been left fatherless. And it was he who eventually provided the dowries by means of which the young women were enabled to make suitable marriages. Sebastián made other and greater charities, sometimes to the benefit of persons entirely unknown to him.

* * *

One day when Sebastián was in the *zócolo*, or main plaza, of the capital, his attention was attracted by the sight of an unfortunate man being conducted to prison. His sympathies aroused, he approached the guards who surrounded the prisoner and asked: "Tell me, Señores, if you please, why this poor man finds himself in this unhappy predicament."*

"He has defaulted a legal debt, that's why, and the judge has sentenced him to a term in *el cárcel*." With this, the nearest policeman turned abruptly away from the questioner to fix the culprit with a stern eye. He wanted no trouble here.

"And does this man with the sad face owe a large sum?" persisted Sebastián, overlooking the coldness of the guard, who, he realized, must consider him unduly inquisitive.

This time the reply was a shade more gruff than the first had been. "Large enough to frighten an ordinary man, I would say — three thousand pesos!" the other threw over his shoulder. Certainly that substantial figure would give this shabby

*Dialogue on this and the two following pages is adapted from Leonardo Aguado's *Vida del Beato Sebastián de Aparicio* (México, D. F.: Editorial Beatriz de Silva, 1947). On pp. 90-91, 93-102, dialogue is translated from the same source. Used with permission.

interferer something to ponder! Three thousand pesos was an awe-inspiring sum for a poor man to contemplate in those days.

But Sebastián had no intention of being thus easily dismissed. He brought himself into step with the burly policeman, seeking to continue the conversation. "That is not so much, Señor, and certainly too little to merit the suffering I can see in your prisoner's eyes. Why don't you set him free? Oh, I know you have your orders to deal him this harsh punishment; but have no fear, I shall gladly pay his debt."

The guard did not even deign to show astonishment at this preposterous speech. Did the man take him for a fool? This was nothing but an insipid joke. However, he had had enough, though perhaps it served him right for having let himself be led into futile words with a curious passer-by in the first place. He threw Sebastián a withering glance as he shoved his shrinking prisoner ahead, intent upon delivering him to jail before a crowd would be attracted. Already several bystanders were listening in on the exchange with lively interest. It would never do to encourage any sort of demonstration.

But Sebastián had not been joking by any means, and now he placed himself directly in the path of the party, determined to argue the merits of his proposal. At this moment, the judge, who had some minutes before handed down the verdict against the miserable debtor, happened to be passing through the plaza. Incensed to see someone apparently trying to interfere with the execution of his order, he interposed himself in the argument, demanding to know who it was who dared presume to impede the just processes of law!

"You make a mistake, *mi juez*," replied Sebastián calmly. "I have no wish whatever to obstruct the justice of your high authority. The tragic countenance of this prisoner inspired me to ask the cause of his troubles. When I heard that his only crime was his poverty, my natural desire was to see if the difficulty could not be adjusted in some reasonable manner; and I

respectfully request that I be allowed to discharge his debt if that is all that stands between him and his liberty. My name is Sebastián de Aparicio."

Now the judge knew very well who Sebastián de Aparicio was and how fine his credit stood in México. This man's word was his bond anywhere. So the promise to pay was accepted forthwith, and the prisoner found himself free, under no order from the judge but that he return in peace to his house! By this time, a crowd had gathered, and all within hearing were considerably edified by this generous act; but Sebastián, not caring for any further discussion or attention, slipped quietly away to arrange for the payment of a debt which had been incurred for an unknown reason by a total stranger!

* * *

All through the years that the now wealthy Sebastián was performing such large-scale charities, his own manner of living remained exactly what it had always been. That is to say, he lived meagerly, in fact poorly. Though self-denial was no longer a necessity, it had never occurred to him to use his hard-earned capital for his own comfort or aggrandizement. He spent lavishly, yes — for charity, for the general good of his community and for the improvement of his land and animals. This last investment guaranteed that there would be still more profit, and so better conditions later on for the objects of his generosity. But Sebastián bought nothing for himself, and he wanted none of the luxuries that now he could easily afford. His dress was so coarse and shabby that it was little wonder the prison guard had been unable to believe in the seriousness of his offer to meet the debt of the miserable prisoner. His diet consisted of nothing but *tortillas* taken with a bit of sauce save on feast days, when he permitted himself a small portion of meat. He drank only water, and he always slept on a piece of

matting or an Indian *petate* on the floor. This rigid discipline was his way of keeping close to the holy poverty of Christ, Who had said: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" In fact, this cargo-hauling road builder turned successful farmer, already possessed all those qualities Christ had blessed in the greatest sermon ever heard. Sebastián was *meek*; he *hungered and thirsted for justice*; he was *merciful*, he was amazingly *clean of heart*; and the time would come when he would be *reproached, persecuted, and spoken of falsely for Christ's sake!* Many there were who had long known him for "*the salt of the earth.*" His own chief concern was that in him the salt should not "*lose its strength.*"

As a young man, Sebastián de Aparicio must have been attractive and personable, for it is recorded that he was much sought after by women. Before his departure from Spain, he had twice found it necessary to rebuke some decidedly immodest advances by two women who had at different times been his employers. He was a healthy, normal youth, but he regarded such suggestions as snares which had been set for him by the devil. In order not to be tempted to offend God, he rejected these women, each time hastily departing from the employment that brought about such undesired situations. Later in America, he declined to consider the marriages proposed to him upon occasion by fathers on behalf of their well-dowered daughters. His time had to be devoted to toiling back and forth across long highways in the pursuit of his business interests, and to his ceaseless spiritual devotions. He kept as completely away from women as from the material comforts and conveniences of life.

But as Sebastián approached his sixtieth year and there was no longer a need to continue his exaggerated labors, he found himself facing old age alone and with no living relatives to benefit from his estate or to attend to his charities after his death. Now, he thought, that if he could but find a proper

young woman who would welcome his offer of protection and economic security for life, while being willing to receive the attentions of a father instead of those of a husband, he might be inclined to marry.

No sooner had he fixed upon this idea, than just such an opportunity arose. A poor man residing in the *colonia* of Chapultepec asked his protection for a lovely daughter whose future he feared might hold danger and sorrow on account of the combination of beauty and poverty that was her lot. The girl was of good character and of pleasing simplicity of heart. Sebastián lost no time in marrying her, after which he provided her with a woman to instruct her in the domestic arts that any housewife had need to know. He willed her his fortune, for, as he was so much older, he believed that he would surely die long before she did. Otherwise, he regarded and treated her as a daughter. But this idyllic arrangement ended unexpectedly with the death of the wife within little more than a year.

Sebastián mourned the loss of his gentle companion, but since he still thought that his plan had been both kind and practical, he decided to repeat it. At the age of sixty-three, he married another admirable young woman with whom he lived in the same father-daughter relationship, re-making his will — this time in *her* favor. This marriage, too, was destined to end soon in death. The second Señora de Aparicio accidentally fell from a tree in the patio of their home and her injuries were fatal. Sebastián was greatly shocked by this second tragedy and, after burying his wife in the Dominican church at Atzacapotzalco, a suburb of the capital, he passed some time in deep mourning. But now he seemed to understand that marriage was not to be the answer to the problems of his advancing age. He dismissed the idea for all time, taking what satisfaction he might in the certainty that both his young wives had "gone to heaven as innocent doves."

Two causes had claimed the attention and the energies of his life — his religion and his work. His labors appeared to be over, at least as he had directed them, toward the gaining of a fortune with which to aid his fellow man. Now he turned totally to his devotions. A serious illness convinced him that he was by no means yet ready to meet his Maker. As he looked back across the years, he could find small merit in his long life of self-denial and unselfish service for others. It had not been enough! In the time left to him, he must attain to a sanctity that was not yet his! In his own judgment, he had perhaps not used his money as wisely for the benefit of the poor as more holy men could have done. Anyway, he was weary of money and eager to be rid of it. To whom should his capital be given that his spirit might be freed from all earthly and material bonds? Recovered in health, he sought the advice of a Franciscan priest. The priest counseled Sebastián to turn his fortune over to the Poor Clares, who had recently established themselves in México but still lacked funds to build their convent. This Sebastián did at once, reserving only a thousand pesos to provide himself with the bare necessities during a now uncertain future. He did, however, request the right to serve the Sisters he had enriched in some menial capacity. He became their servant and sacristan.

But even this was not enough. As his love for Our Lord grew daily through his closeness to the altar in the chapel of the Poor Clares, he pondered the idea of becoming a religious himself. Being now an old man, he realized that he could not hope for the priesthood. Anyway, even when he had been young, his memory had been poor. That may have been one reason why, with his piety, he had not turned to the religious life years before. He had never had the intellectual gifts to become a priest. But he could be a Brother in some Order. That was it! It was natural that he soon chose to be a Franciscan. There was much in the Franciscan manner of life that

suited his own character. The men of St. Francis were humble, poor, and took pleasure in simple things. So did he. Their holy founder had been dedicated to a loving service of the miserable of this world, and to the animals whom he called his "little brothers" and his "little sisters." So was Sebastián de Aparicio. True, he might not have much time left or the strength to be very useful to a community of religious, but he could still be its servant, he could still till the soil or handle a team of oxen. At least he would offer himself.

He commenced his novitiate at the Franciscan monastery in 1574, an aged but sturdy figure of seventy-two years in a class of youngsters! He would be a First Order lay Brother.

* * *

His year of novitiate concluded, there arose a question as to whether Sebastián should be received into the Order after all. One faction of the Franciscans in México City contended that he was too old to be charged with the duties of a lay Brother, which were more strenuous than those of a priest. The Brothers did all the physical work for the *conventos*. The opposing party pointed out his sanctity and claimed that, regardless of his age, his very virtues would lend luster to the community. The argument over his acceptance filled a three-day conference. Sebastián was fully aware of this division of opinion, but he did not permit himself to become agitated. God had put him here and he was willing to leave the outcome of the disagreement and everything else in life to Him. Before anything was certain, he calmly distributed to the poor his last thousand pesos, the sum he had reserved against just such an emergency as he now might have to face, when he had signed his fortune over to the Poor Clares. One of the Franciscans, seeing what he had done, was aghast.

"Don't you think it rather imprudent to part with your money in view of the uncertainty of your profession, Brother?" he asked.

"It is not important, Hermano.* God put me in this place; if He no longer wishes me here, I can go back to my former work, thanks to the good health with which He has blessed me."

In the end, matters were settled in favor of Sebastián, and to his great joy he was able to make his profession on the feast day of his special patron and advocate, St. Anthony of Padua. His first assignment was to a small monastery in the beautiful little pueblo of Tecali, situated about twenty miles from Puebla. This news caused the dismay of a certain religious, who pointed out to the newly professed lay Brother that Tecali was not a very healthful location and furthermore lacked almost every convenience. It was his judgment that, considering Sebastián's advanced age, it would be quite reasonable for him to request the superior to send him to a more healthful and better equipped house.

Scandalized, Brother Sebastián replied to this suggestion: "Where they send us in the service of God, we go willingly, for we are not our own, but Another's." With this righteous disposition, he proceeded at once to his post in Tecali, where he contentedly served for a year as cook, alms collector, porter, dining-room attendant and gardener, to the complete satisfaction of all.

In 1576, he received orders to transfer to the great Franciscan monastery at Puebla de los Angeles, the city where he had commenced his labors in America and from which he had gone out to be a *carretero* and a builder of highways. The Father Guardian at Puebla at once charged him with the duty of collecting the alms of grain — corn and wheat — that were the contributions of the outlying *haciendas* to the community.

*Brother.

This was a familiar labor for Sebastián; and he immediately took steps to procure donations of oxen and to build *carretas*, since he had had occasion to know from long experience how much more efficiently he could make bulky collections by such means. When he was not carting supplies in to San Francisco, he spent his time cutting and hauling from the surrounding mountains the firewood necessary for the monastery.

While engaged in this exhausting labor, he formed the habit of stopping under a certain particularly large tree growing on a spot about one league north of Puebla. Here he would unhitch his oxen, and conceal the harness and other implements among the branches where they would be safe. Then he would proceed into the adjacent hills to cut his wood. This done, he would carry the wood back to his wagons and load it before nightfall. At bedtime, he would crawl beneath one of the carts and take brief naps between his prayers and meditations. At daybreak, he would re-hitch the oxen and return, tranquil and happy, to the monastery. The next day he would be off again to pick up alms of grain that were waiting for him in different *haciendas* of the region. Occasionally, he was given an Indian to assist him in his labors, but largely he went and came and toiled alone in the service of his Brothers.

He was a very successful alms collector, for it was almost impossible for even the most niggardly *hacendados* to refuse his gentle, cheerful spirit or his simple words spoken always in a low, tender tone: "God guard you, brothers. Is there anything to offer God and St. Francis?" As for his diligence, it never failed. Age, infirmities (when he suffered them), weariness, nothing stopped him, not even the tempests and drenching rains of the wet Mexican summers! Whether the ground was awash from a July cloudburst or stiff with the crystals of December's frost, he continued to sleep under his *carreta* with no more than the mantle of his habit for covering. And this

was always a threadbare affair, likely, indeed, to be full of holes. He rejected the plain but adequate clothing that was his rightful portion as a member of the community, selecting for his use habits which the other *frailes* had discarded as being indecently shabby. He went barefoot, and many times his poor feet were covered with blood from cuts and scratches as he trod the jagged mountain passes. Sebastián ignored all discomforts. His days and nights were one long song of thanksgiving to God for all the physical suffering that brought him closer to his heroic, gentle Jesus.

But there was one trial he had not yet been called upon to endure in all his long living. It was a sacrifice he could not make of his own will. It had to come from outside. And it did! He became an object of censure and ridicule to a group of his own brothers in religion! For the first time he now saw his labors, self-denials, humility and lack of ambition scorned by his fellows. Even the roistering sailors and passengers on the ship which had brought him from Spain in his thirty-first year had been won over in little time. But unhappily his new opponents were less capable of discerning the source of his simple merits than those worldly ones had been. Brother Sebastián's very patience and saintly humility irked them. He wore ragged, disreputable clothing that shamed them, and needlessly. He toiled exaggeratedly, stupidly delighting in the companionship of his beasts. He was probably almost as insensitive and unthinking as a beast himself! And certainly he *was* stupid, as anyone could plainly see. Had he ever really *learned* the ritual of his Faith so that he could repeat it properly? He had *not*! Although his hourly living should have shown any unprejudiced heart clearly enough that he understood each article and Commandment of God and His Church, they grumbled about the absurd errors that he persisted in making in the responses when he was called upon to assist at Mass. He was a disgrace to them all! And they began

to complain to the Father Guardian of his many disgusting defects.

It was not long until that dignitary of the Order shared their annoyance and revulsion to Sebastián's "degraded" manner of life. Calling the stalwart old man to him, the Guardian gave him some very bad moments as he impatiently charged him with his stupidity and the scandal he was creating. If this was what his association with his oxen and his meanderings across the mountain ranges had done for them all, he could leave off his trail-trudging at once and remain indoors. Furthermore, he could re-enter the classroom with the new novices and stay there until he had mastered all their lessons, "*a pié de la letra* — to the last letter"!

Poor Brother Sebastián heard all this in the utmost humility. He made no effort to excuse his shortcomings, either real or imagined, his failures of memory, or his "disgusting" choice of the complete poverty he had espoused for love of Christ. He replied simply, "Brother Guardian, I came here to do in the service of God and His religion that which I know how to do. If I have not attended to all as I ought, it is not because I have not wished to but only that I was not able. Whatever you order me, I shall try to do, out of love of God and obedience; I will do it with all pleasure since only for this am I in religion."

It would seem that this meek reply should have pleased the Father Guardian, but it did no such thing. His ire only mounted and he added an accusation that these words were untrue. Sebastián had not even so much as made a proper effort to learn the rudiments required of the novices, but had contented himself in living slothfully and grossly in an absurd pretense of saintliness. Eyes submissively cast down, the aged Brother answered in his habitually moderate, low-pitched tones, with a speech that was to be remembered as a great and holy indictment.

"It is true I have done nothing good, but merely stupid things; but God knows where I will go with my stupidity, and you with your learning."

So he returned to the classroom, but try as he might he could not manage to capture his beloved Faith in set and literal phrases. Alas, he simply had not that type of memory. The instructors treated him with the utmost harshness, imposing scoldings and punishments under which he suffered cruelly but which he transformed into benefits by offering them all to Our Lord. When at last they prohibited him from assisting at Mass, saying he was fit only to attend oxen, it was almost too much for bearing. But even then he took comfort, telling his adored Redeemer: "Lord, only for You, Who suffered such great indignities for me, am I able to endure this."

But although he was never able to give satisfaction to his professors, God finally relieved Sebastián of his sorrows; for in time the Father Guardian became convinced that the complaints against him had been unjustified and that he was innocent of any offense toward religion or the community. Such profound humility, unquestioning obedience — the perfection of his life — could only accompany the most holy simplicity. This change of attitude permitted Sebastián's honorable return to his beloved outdoors and to his oxen. Once again he became the collector of alms for San Francisco. Once more his soft accents were heard in many distant *haciendas*: "God guard you, brothers. Is there anything here for God and St. Francis?"

* * *

Brother Sebastián had long been expert in the taming of animals. But now it began to be seen that his domination of his oxen was something decidedly out of the ordinary. It was not so remarkable that his dumb helpers loved him devotedly, for he in turn loved them and showed his love in many ways.

When they came to him to lick his ragged old habit, that might perhaps have been because he was accustomed to carry little treats for them in its sleeves, pieces of bread and toothsome young ears of corn. Nor was it so strange that they responded when he spoke their names, for he always called each by the name he had given it and the oxen were used to the gentle directions he addressed to "Capitán," "Aceituno," "Blanquillo," and so forth. Capitán was the leader. It could be considered mere whimsy when Sebastián spoke to the animals almost as though they were human beings. After all, they were his only companions. "*Pues*, we are all born to work and to do what we are told; we serve the *frailes*." Such tender care and attention as he gave them could be expected to result in a certain obedience on their part.

But obedience went a great deal further than that with Hermano Sebastián's oxen. It was noted with amazement that when he left portions of corn or hay for their evening meal, he would speak the name of each animal, indicating exactly his share of the common provision, admonishing that no one should eat more than his own portion, since it would mean depriving the others. This was carrying whimsy pretty far! Could it always be chance that caused the oxen to follow out to the letter these warnings against greediness? For the animals invariably obeyed him, mastering their strongest instinct — the instinct for food. To Capitán, Sebastián gave special responsibilities. "Take these *coristas* where they may eat and have care that in the morning you have them back here promptly on the hour," he would command the lead ox after he had unhitched the *carretas* for the night and was ready to roll under one of them for his own night's rest. And Capitán would do exactly what he had been told! At the precise hour when it was time to start out again in the morning, he would be back with all his fellows, ready for work!

One of the stories that was soon being circulated about Sebastián and his oxen came from the lips of a lady living on an *hacienda* near Cholula. It happened that she had offered the old Franciscan a bite of breakfast one morning, and he was enjoying this when she chanced to look out into a field of new corn and was aghast to see his whole train of animals standing squarely in its center. In agitation for the tender crop, she called the good Brother's attention to this unforeseen mishap. But he continued eating quite tranquilly after telling the woman that she had no cause for worry. He had instructed his oxen that they must touch nothing on the *hacienda* and it was certain that they would not. However, seeing that this declaration did little to calm her fears, he went with her into the field, calling to Capitán, who immediately led the others from the *milpa* so carefully that not a blade was bruised; and when an inspection was made, it was verified that nothing whatever had been eaten.

On another occasion, Sebastián found himself arriving at an *hacienda* just as the owner was about to kill a bull that had resisted all efforts to subdue its rebellious spirit. It was a dangerous beast, given to rushing anyone who approached it, so that it was no good for any service. When Sebastián saw what was about to take place, he addressed himself to the *hacendado*: "Brother, you wish to kill this poor little ox; count it already dead and give it to me for the service of the *carretas* and my Father St. Francis."

This the owner was quite willing to do, for he was keenly interested in observing what would happen. Could it just be that the tall yarns told of old Hermano Sebastián and his genius for the domination of animals were true and that he might be equal to handling even *this* ugly brute?

Sebastián began by untying the cord of his habit. With this in his hand, he gently called the animal. After a long, appraising look, and at the moment when the witnesses felt sure

that the bull was about to charge the foolhardy religious, the beast responded by walking slowly, step by step, toward Sebastián. Coming close, it commenced to lick the sleeve of his habit just as the tame oxen were accustomed to do. Then, making no difficulty whatever, it permitted its new friend to slip the cord over its head, standing patiently to learn his next order!

Seeing this marvel, to their great astonishment, the people who had gathered to watch the incident tried to fall on their knees to kiss the scarred old feet of the humble Brother; but he resisted all such homage, saying: "This is nothing meritorious in me, but in St. Francis, whom it saw in the *cordón*. You must all join me in giving thanks to God for this favor." Was it any wonder that everyone in the district was soon speaking in awed tones of these strange things worked by the tattered Brother from San Francisco?

* * *

Brother Sebastián never had a cell in the monastery, nor a bed, but continued sleeping on the floor in odd corners whenever he had occasion to pass the night indoors. Nor did his dress improve, for all the scoldings he had received. Knowing that without shoes of some sort he could not approach the altar when it was his turn to assist at Mass, he would seize whatever footgear he could lay his hands on at the instant. One morning when it was seen that he had provided himself with one black and one white shoe, he was severely reproved by one of the priests for carrying his carelessness so far as to present himself in such an unseemly regalia. It was not respectful.

"Padre," replied Brother Sebastián reasonably, "the others wear what they have, but I use what I may."

Faithful to the end to his old austerity in diet, he never partook of the food that was his portion, but he did take the pains to claim it so that he might give it to the Indians he encountered in his long tramps alongside his carts. Once when he was being accompanied by a *peón* assigned to assist him by the Father Guardian, the Indian, seeing that the last morsel of food had been given to the needy they had passed on a strenuous morning's walk, asked: "But what are *we* to eat, *mi Hermano?*"

"God knows," came the answer, "and He will provide."

And, of course, He always did, sometimes through natural coincidence though oftener by means of the generosity of charitable hearts; but occasionally, too, by entirely unexplainable agents. There was one time when, after a foodless twenty-four hours, Brother Sebastián found a large roll of hot bread in the sleeve of his habit with which to provide his famished *peón*! But one thing remained ever the same. Sebastián never made the slightest provision from the monastery for his own sustenance on the trips nor, for that matter, in behalf of the Indian who occasionally aided him in his labors. The community finally gave up arguing with him about it!

Though he may have been something of a problem to his brothers in religion, Sebastián was a shining light to all the faithful of the region and therefore also an honor to San Francisco Monastery. The miracles were piling up now, if the throngs of Poblanos — the citizens of Puebla who were seeking him out in all their troubles to beg his intercession — were to be credited. The stories were many, but woven through the theme of each were the same strong strands of tranquil fortitude, faith and simple holiness.

There was the time that Sebastián had arrived at the *convento* with a great supply of wood from the mountains of Tlaxcala, only to be directed by the Father Guardian to set

off again immediately to pick up a cargo of corn at Tepeaca. The heart of the worn old Brother was full of compliance, but this seemed quite impossible in view of a broken axle and wheel pin on one of his wagons. News of the mishap did not impress the Guardian who, perhaps, was not of a mechanical bent of mind, and he insisted that Sebastián get on his way at once, "without further excuses or pretexts." To this demand, the humble lay Brother replied by asking the superior's blessing and obediently heading his tired teams into the six-league road which, between Puebla and Tepeaca, was cut by innumerable deep barrancas. Three days later he was back, having attended to everything just as he had been ordered. A gentleman who had observed the broken axle and pin at the time of departure and who saw them in exactly the same condition after the return, asked Sebastián how he explained the fact that a heavily loaded *carreta* in such condition had ever managed to pass over that rough terrain without losing a wheel. "What can we say but that my Father St. Francis went along beside us holding that wheel?" was the bland suggestion.

On another occasion, the old man was transporting the alms in a damaged wagon pulled by only two oxen, when, near the *barranca* of Tulcingo, he happened upon the Governor of Tlaxcala, who warned him that the canyon was far too dangerous to risk even on horseback. This fact Sebastián knew well, but he replied simply: "He whose alms these are will get the *carreta* across." And so it was, for as the Governor was slowly descending into the *barranca* on foot, he looked up to see in amazement that St. Francis' *carreta* and St. Francis' true son had already reached the heights on the opposite side with no sign of any damage whatsoever!

* * *

Fray Juan de Santa Ana, a renowned priest of the Order, thought it time to look into the matter of Brother Sebastián. He would examine the possible reasons for his conduct and the motivation for his works as well as instruct him, perhaps, in the theology of mysticism! It seemed somewhat strange that one so constantly employed in rough physical labor should attain to such sublimity as was being claimed for the aged alms collector of San Francisco. The priest had his wish when he chanced to run into Sebastián while the latter was fulfilling his duties at a certain *hacienda*. After Fray Juan had greeted him with dignified expressions of fraternal love, Brother Sebastián replied characteristically, "O *Poca Ropa*,* who has brought you here? In truth, you find me idling because I have to be here today and tomorrow, but then we are going, if it be God's pleasure."

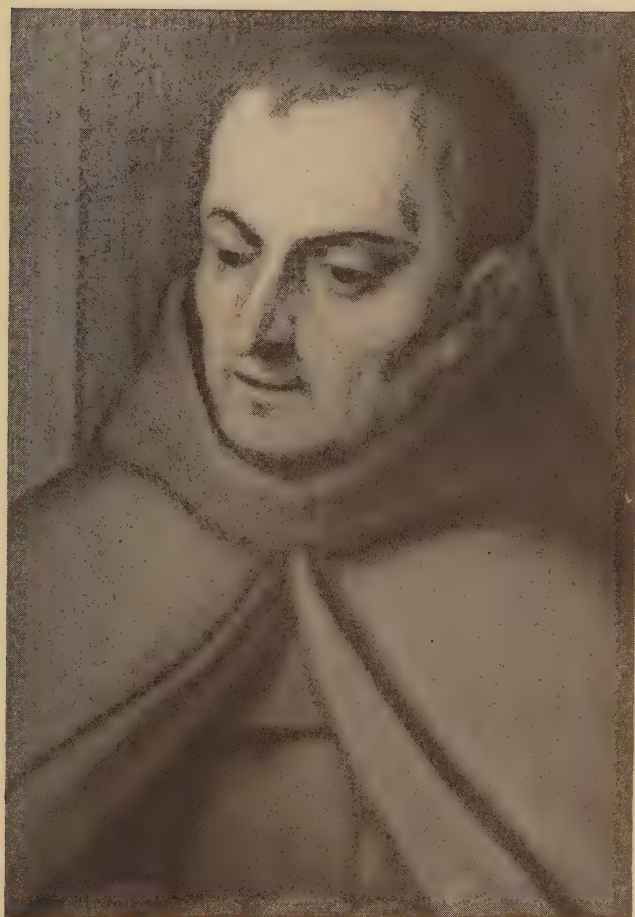
There followed some words about his current errand and how he had passed the previous night sleeping on the road. The priest asked him if he was not frightened to sleep in such isolated spots, since it was reported that he had known the persecution of demons.

To this Sebastián replied, "I no longer have fear, even though I have seen more demons than flies, for the reason that they can do no harm whatever without the license of God."

Father Juan continued questioning him about his mode of life and his spiritual exercises, to all of which Sebastián gave satisfaction with a single answer, "Look, *Poca Ropa*, that which I do is what obedience demands of me. I sleep where I can. As to what God sends me, I see that He gave me the *convento*; but above all, faith as strong as iron so as not to lose sight of Him Who never fails."

Juan de Santa Ana recognized the perfection of understanding revealed by these simple phrases and was content that

*"*Poca Ropa*" would mean literally "Few clothes," and was a favorite title of Sebastián for addressing his discalced Brothers.



FRAY PEDRO DE GANTE

FIRST CHAPEL BUILT BY PEDRO DE GANTE, STILL STANDING AT TEXCOCO, MÉXICO





MONASTERY LATER DEVELOPED FROM THAT OF NUESTRA SENORA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN,
AT TEHUACÁN, MÉXICO, WHERE MOTOLINÍA LABORED



MOTOLINÍA MAKING MEASUREMENTS FOR STREETS IN THE FOUND-
ING OF THE CITY OF PUEBLA, MÉXICO



BISHOP JUAN DE ZUMÁRRAGA

STATUE REPRESENTING JUAN DIEGO AS HE SHOWED THE IMAGE OF OUR LADY OF
GUADALUPE TO BISHOP ZUMÁRRAGA





CHURCH OF SAN FELIPE AT SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS, WHERE
FRAY MARGIL PREACHED TO THE FAITHFUL

TARASCAN SHEPHERD AT LAKE PÁTZCUARO IN MICHOACÁN, WHERE DON
VASCO DE QUIROGA FOUNDED AMERICA'S FIRST REPUBLICS



GROUP OF TARASCAN BOYS DESCENDED FROM INDIANS MINISTERED TO BY
BISHOP QUIROGA AND THE FRANCISCANS

Inset at right: AN OLD PAINTING OF HERMANO PEDRO DE BETANCOURT, FOUNDER OF
THE BETHLEHEMITES



FRAY JUNÍPERO SERRA



RUINED CHURCH AND MONASTERY OF SAN FRANCISCO, ANTIGUA
— CHAPEL WHERE HERMANO PEDRO IS BURIED, IS STILL INTACT.

INCORRUPT BODY OF BLESSED SEBASTIÁN DE APARICIO IN THE CHURCH OF SAN
FRANCISCO, CITY OF PUEBLA



OLD FRANCISCAN CHURCH AT TEPANCO, STATE OF PUEBLA, WHICH STANDS TODAY
ALONG ONE OF BLESSED SEBASTIÁN'S ROUTES



THE ACTUAL SCENE OF THE FLIGHT OF DON RODRIGO ARIAS DE MALDONADO FROM THE RESIDENCE OF DONA ELVIRA IN SEARCH OF HERMANO PEDRO (*see text, pp. 122-123*). THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS PART OF A MOTION PICTURE ILLUSTRATIVE OF EARLY SPANISH-AMERICAN HISTORY.

widow's prized image of the Virgin "in order that, having the shell, he should also have the pearl."*

Hermano Pedro reverently installed the beautiful image in the *oratorio* he had made from the *sala* of the cramped little building. There was only one other room, the kitchen, which he would have to make do somehow for the beginnings of the hospital and school he was now determined to give to his beloved poor. He would also sleep on the kitchen's earthen floor, but not the first night of his occupancy. The whole of that, he would spend on his knees in the *oratorio* praying to the Virgin, that she might illuminate and bless his projects for the city she had placed in his care!

The streets about Pedro's new little establishment swarmed with the neglected children of the poor who had never known a school. They were endangered, both morally and physically, by lack of discipline. The gentle Brother had a strong love of children, and, as the first work of his house he sought to change the dismaying situation in which he found them. He engaged a *maestro*, Don Mateo Polancos, who agreed to receive for his pay such alms as Pedro could manage to collect. The Franciscan priest, Pablo Sánchez, would devote some of his time to teaching catechism from the simplified version he had composed. Pedro held open a few periods weekly in which to offer the pupils instruction on those topics so close to his heart, "piety" and "virtue." Morning classes were for girls; the afternoon for the boys. The premises were soon crowded to capacity with the underprivileged youngsters Pedro had gathered from the streets and ditches of the squalid *barrio*.

The actual birth of the convalescents' hospital which had so long been his fondest hope seemed finally to come about by chance! Having heard that there was an old *mulata* slave, a paralytic, dying in the streets of Santiago, abandoned by her masters, Pedro's tender heart sent him out to search for the

*Vela, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

miserable creature. He did not rest until he had found her, after which he carried her home across his frail shoulders. He then took care of her until death ended her sufferings. He dug her grave with his own hands, weeping as he prayed for her and for all the deserted and afflicted of the earth. This act of simple love was the solid base upon which the great hospital work of Hermano Pedro was now to rise with remarkable speed.

The little house, of course, could not be made to suffice for all these activities, and something had to be done about an adequate hospital building. Undoubtedly a more "prudent" soul than Pedro would have secured his hospital first and commenced receiving patients afterward. But that had never been his way. He could not deny his unshakeable faith in God through "reasonable precaution." However, he was practical enough to realize that he must now seek a license for his project from the *Audiencia* as well as the approval of his bishop.

His Excellency Payo de Rivera was entirely sympathetic with this fervent young *Tercero's* aims, but he was naturally concerned to know *how* he expected to raise the funds to build and maintain such a considerable foundation. His answer to the Bishop's questions can be taken as the key to Pedro's whole being.

"This, Father, I do not know; but God, Who does know, will help me."

This incontestable philosophy apparently satisfied the good prelate, and without waiting for the official approbation of the court Pedro threw himself upon his problem by starting out at once to solicit alms. His success amazed everyone. Money, materials and labor for the new building all came to hand in almost exact proportion to the need. Pedro himself joined the laborers whenever a man might be needed, taking equal pleasure in the work of a foreman or *peón*. The building crew no-

ticed that they never tired on the job when the good Brother was there beside them. Soon they accepted the idea that, although their materials might sometimes run alarmingly low, there was no need to worry. Even if Pedro appeared to ignore the occasional threat of a depletion of supplies, somehow the work never had to be stopped or delayed. The necessary lumber always arrived in time, if often only at the last moment. Santiago just couldn't let the brave little Brother down! So, this risky enterprise for God, which *did* seem to be fore-ordained to surmount every obstacle, came to be a fascinating daily gamble for the workmen. And in surprisingly little time, they had built a perfectly good hospital!

The building was soon furnished and equipped by the generous Santiaguëños who had begun to take great pride in the dauntless Brother whom they were now calling "the Servant of God." The hospital of Hermano Pedro de Betancourt was now a fact. It was to flourish and to become a great influence in the city it has served right down to our own day.

Bishop Payo de Rivera must have watched all these things with keen interest, while adding his prayers to Pedro's own that such an ambitious work might succeed in making a splendid contribution to the welfare of his diocese. The prelate understood perfectly that Pedro's faith was the center and spirit of it all, but this amazing young man had also shown decided genius for organization and management. Perhaps he had been a failure at Latin and theology, but the Bishop could find no flaw in the way he had gone about this vital labor for religion. As for Pedro's gifts of the mind, Bishop de Rivera was able to declare: "I have seen him treat some points with intelligence superior to the perception possible to some of us only after much labor and studious application."*

A number of other Third Order Brothers gradually joined Pedro de Betancourt to help care for the building and to

*Quoted by Vela, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

nurse the ill. It had been decided that the hospital would receive no women patients, but men of any age or class were always welcome. The Brothers, imitating Pedro, made human ambulances of themselves, carrying in the sick on their backs. They also carried in the loads of food, bedding, firewood and clothing donated by well-to-do citizens. The name *Hermano Pedro* chose for his little community was *Belén* — Bethlehem. The church they soon built became the center of much activity. There Pedro staged jubilant festivities following the colorful Christmas Masses he arranged to be celebrated for his poor children.

Now that all was going so well, Pedro had time to look again at his beloved city and make another diagnosis — this time of its spiritual sickness. As in any center of wealth and luxury, there was sin to appall the Servant of God. He knew, of course, that many of the sinners were good people at heart. It was chiefly that they had grown careless of their morals in the midst of the gay social whirl of Santiago's heyday. Some of them were merely self-centered and pleasure-loving, absorbed in the silly competitions of society. Others had been spoiled by too much power or were being driven to injustice by the desire for power. But they were endangering their souls and making of themselves "stumbling blocks" to their brothers. Was there anything that he, whose labor had always been for the poor, could do in the service of the rich? Pedro thought yes.

Their ills must be cured by repentance — confession and penance. How might he inoffensively remind them of that? His plan was as simple as it was effective. At the end of each day's work, he went out into the streets and walked the length and breadth of the town ringing a little bronze bell. Occasionally above its tinkle his compassionate voice might be heard chanting:

"Take heed, brothers,
that we have a soul;
that when we lose it
we may not find it again."*

Santiago soon knew what Pedro was about now, and though there were some who pretended to be amused, the power of his little bell grew and grew until for hundreds it had become the very symbol of repentance. Its mellow but penetrating tones *did* seem to turn up in some very strange places precisely at the most critical moments in the lives of many rich and powerful Santiagüños.

There came a day when one of the judges of the *Audiencia*, whose great name had never known a blemish, called together his three associates and accused himself of having hired the man who had murdered his daughter's sweetheart — an objectionable young blade of whom he had heartily disapproved. The judges were horrified, but felt sure that reasons could be found upon which to base their dear friend's defense in order to obtain his ultimate acquittal in court. The unhappy man refused to consider defending himself or even to name the miserable tool he had paid to do this violence. He alone was to blame, for he had really used the creature's abject poverty to tempt him to crime. Now he demanded that the *Audiencia* order him hanged exactly as it would sentence any other murderer to hanging. That would be only justice.

Why had he revealed this wholly unsuspected story? He had been unable to bear the long evenings in his stately mansion, during which Pedro, stationed in a doorway across the street, kept ringing the bell that had become Santiago's conscience! Finally the highly respected official had gone out to meet the ringer and to tell him of his sin. But it was quite all right. Pedro had promised to remain with him through his last

*Quoted by Vela, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

hours on earth and meanwhile, having repented and gone to confession, he had made himself ready to meet his Maker!

* * *

About this time, a celebrity arrived to open a great house in Santiago. This was Don Rodrigo Arias de Maldonado y Venegas, famous as the pacifier of the ferocious Talamanca tribes of Costa Rica. Don Rodrigo had also served as governor of that territory from the surprisingly early age of twenty. This brilliant and handsome descendant of Spanish grandees was still very young, but responsibility and success had given him the bearing of a distinguished man of the world. More than this, he was wealthy, charming and generous. The balls which he was soon giving in his magnificent home on *La Calle de la Nobleza** were among the most brilliant fêtes the Santiaguëños had ever seen. Such a variety of qualities and attainments made him one of the most sought-after figures in the gay society of the capital. Perhaps he was almost *too* popular, for it is said that the ladies of all ages vied with one another to attract the slightest attention from him; and finally it was understood that he had fallen in love with one of them. Doña Elvira was the beautiful young wife of an aged nobleman. Unfortunately she returned Don Rodrigo's emotion and before long they were seeking opportunities to meet during her husband's frequent absences from the city.

One fateful evening when Don Rodrigo was visiting the Doña Elvira, she startled him by collapsing into what he at first believed to be a faint. But she had not fainted. The beautiful Doña Elvira was dead! Don Rodrigo's horror at this tragedy was intensified by the circumstances, for he did not know how he could call for help. While he was suffering so much, torn between his grief and his concern for Elvira's good name, he

*"The Street of the Nobility."

suddenly heard the bell of Hermano Pedro! Its tones had just tinkled around a nearby corner, and as the ringing grew louder he knew that Pedro was approaching the house. Don Rodrigo rushed headlong into the street to fall on his knees before the Servant of God and relate what had happened, admitting his sinful love for a married woman. Showing no surprise, Pedro merely said that they must go in to her.

The holy man whose daily life was centered in a hospital, first made sure that this was really death. Elvira's heart and pulse had stopped completely. There was nothing left to do now but pray, so they prayed together for the soul of the lovely lady who had gone to meet her God with no warning or any preparation whatsoever. Then occurred one of the many miracles that are known to have been worked through the intervention of Hermano Pedro de Betancourt. For, as he prayed for Our Lord's mercy toward poor Doña Elvira, the color slowly returned to her beautiful face, her eyelids fluttered open and she lived again! When Hermano Pedro finally left the house of the grateful and remorseful lady, Don Rodrigo followed him back to Belén.

In a bare little cell, the proud conquistador knelt before the humble Brother, pleading to be taught what he might do to atone for his sin.

"God has already *told* you what to do," murmured Pedro soothingly; "so let us rejoice and say the Our Father."

* * *

The very next day Don Rodrigo abandoned the pleasures and glories of the world to become one of the lowly Brothers at Belén. Even so, Hermano Pedro would not permit him to take the habit of the Third Order until he had been seriously tested. Dressed in his most magnificent clothes, the nobleman had to carry the raw meat supplies for the hospital right through the streets of the town, the great, freshly slaughtered

carcasses of beeves and sheep lashed to his aristocratic shoulders! Amazed and shocked at this spectacle, his friends and acquaintances believed he had lost his reason. But this was only the beginning. However, the spirit of Rodrigo de Maldonado was indeed great, and he successfully complied with all that his penance required of him. He refused to listen to the arguments of the many who now besieged Belén to warn him that he was making a tragic mistake and one he would live to regret bitterly. Apparently they felt that it was one thing for the holy little Brother to sacrifice himself to such worthy affairs, but something else entirely for their favorite to desert their luxurious *salas* for such ridiculous and unseemly drudgery. But, when he didn't actually refuse to see them altogether he sent them away in frustration. That which his heart now understood was so personal that others could not be expected to share it.

It was after he had donned the coarse habit of the *Terceros* and taken the name of Fray Rodrigo de la Cruz, however, that he was called upon to meet the most severe test of all. For it was then that he received the mandate of his King which proclaimed him Marqués of Talamanca, granting him a great extent of land and large holdings of Indians in reward for his remarkable services to the Crown in Costa Rica. But Fray Rodrigo declined these honors and favors. He already possessed the only title by which he would ever again be known — *fraile* — and he wished no vast estates in this world, but only his chosen place at the side of Hermano Pedro. For the rest of the holy Brother's life, Fray Rodrigo would share all his labors, his joys and his sorrows!

When Bishop Payo de Rivera had heard of these things, he congratulated Hermano Pedro. "Brother, you have conquered a conqueror!"* And he had, for with the help of his

*Quoted by Vela, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

brilliant disciple Belén soon attained a success such as had not yet been dreamed.

* * *

To all intents, the men of Belén had become an individual Order of religious by 1666. Before long they would have their Order in fact — the Bethlehem Order of Hospital Brothers. Hermano Pedro, who was, of course, its glorious inspiration, had come to rely more and more on Fray Rodrigo de la Cruz. These two most fruitfully combined their widely varied gifts and personalities. Now they had a newer and greater hospital plant where their work had thrived and increased mightily. They had often discussed their dream for a new Order and were nearly ready to solicit the Holy Father for approval of their constitution.

But now, worn out by his superhuman toil, Hermano Pedro, whose great spirit had always refused to bow to the natural frailty of his body, suddenly fell ill. He realized that he would soon be called home by God. It was as if this happy end was possible only now that Fray Rodrigo was there to take up the blessed burden of Santiago which Pedro had carried for more than thirteen years since the day he had accepted it from the Virgin at Petapa. Before receiving the Last Sacraments, Hermano Pedro had Fray Rodrigo's assurance that he would go to Rome very soon to speak with the Pope about their Order of Bethlehem. Pedro replied that he was content, that he already knew that this Order was destined to spread over the world, a mighty influence for God wherever it went.

The death of Hermano Pedro in April, 1667, at the age of forty-one, was the greatest sorrow that Santiago had ever known. He was buried in the chapel of the Third Order at San Francisco. Immediately thereafter, Fray Rodrigo made good his word to the miracle-worker who had been the instrument of his repentance. Rome approved the constitution of the

Bethlehemites and, under Rodrigo's able direction, the Order spread to México, Peru and many other lands. In this splendid work of love and mercy, Fray Rodrigo lived to be a very old man, fulfilling the dream of a poor boy whose faulty memory had prevented his ordination as a priest of the Church!

Meanwhile, the tomb of Hermano Pedro remained the center of interest in Santiago. It was never deserted. Everyone, from the highest society of the capital to the lowliest Indian pilgrim from the distant hills, came there to pray and to implore Pedro's intercession for their dearest causes. The articles for his beatification and canonization were approved by the Church in 1772, and he became *El Venerable* Hermano Pedro for the whole Catholic world as well as the best-loved of his nation. Less than a year later, the tragic earthquake that was to cast the glory of Santiago to the ground in three minutes of terrifying convulsion, caused the loss of most of the graves of her illustrious dead beneath tons upon tons of rock and crushed adobe. The massive Church and Monastery of San Francisco was left a pathetic, irreparable ruin, mere fragments suggesting its former beauty and grandeur. Only the Third Order chapel, in which the remains of Hermano Pedro had been so lovingly sealed, was spared to stand sturdily to our own day. Of all the resting places of Guatemala's historic "greats" — Pedro de Alvarado, the Conqueror; Beatriz de la Cueva, his widow and the only feminine ruler of an American country; Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the most famous historian of the Conquest; prelates and governors — only Pedro de Betancourt's was to remain where Santiago, now Antigua, might always find him in its troubles. His grave is still the first shrine of Guatemala, his story its most greatly treasured tradition, his name "first in the hearts of his countrymen."

VIII. FIRST AMONG GOD'S WALKERS

IF NONE of the Christian apostles have been more hard-working or diligent than the Franciscan friars, neither has history yet seen a company of happier men. Simple, unaffected joy was the keynote to the religious faith of St. Francis of Assisi, who sang and joked and both tenderly and gaily loved all God's creation. His spirit has been closely imitated by scores of his followers — and Antonio Margil was born with it!

The child of poor but pious parents living in the Spanish city of Valencia, little Antonio also was marked, from the day of his birth in August, 1657, by the tender, gay and devoutly happy genius exemplified by St. Francis. Almost as soon as he could smile, he fairly exuded an enchanting joy. And when he learned to talk, he expressed happiness habitually, without the contrasting displays of selfishness, obstinacy and jealousy we are accustomed to see in most infants. He loved everyone.

Antonio had been baptized when he was only two days old and thus had really almost never been without grace. In view of this and his early training it is not surprising that he was already strongly attached to religion by the time he reached catechism age. He saw nothing difficult in God's law, which had been so sweetened by the love of Christ. Thus he could be exceptionally devout without losing a jot of his natural playfulness.

From the beginning of his understanding of anything, Antonio was devoted to the great Santa Teresa de Jesús; and in some ways his early life resembled hers. Certainly all the joyous piety of his boyhood was a mark we know to have graced Santa Teresa's first years. It is said that there were simply no troubles to mar his early days. This could only have been because he readily transformed trials into happiness, and true happiness lies in gratitude to God for whatever He sees fit to send us.

When he was seven, Antonio began to make fasts; and the food that he refrained from eating he carried to school to give to the poorest children. In this way he obtained double value for his act. Fasting out of love for God, he also was practicing charity to others. He never, of course, patronized any poor child he favored, for he always regarded himself as the least of all. As a small lad he especially delighted in fashioning little altars before which he played at saying Mass and preaching. Otherwise, he shared in the normal games of his friends, accompanying them eagerly to processions and fairs, romping with them in the streets, making excursions to the beaches. His lighthearted jokes and pranks won him popularity with his playfellows but these were never indulged in at the expense of others.

It was an epoch during which, as one great writer has said, "virtue wore a happy face";* so probably no one was particularly surprised when at the age of fifteen young Antonio Margil announced that he wished to be a Franciscan. He was not opposed in his desire and in April, 1673, he received the habit at the Convento de la Corona de Cristo at Valencia. Exactly a year later, he made his profession; and during the reading of the Gospel for that day, April 25, 1674, Antonio, now known as Margil de Jesús, discovered the real direction of his career.

"And He said to them: 'The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest. Go. Behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry neither purse, nor wallet, nor sandals. . . . And whatever town you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you, and cure the sick who are there, and say to them: "The kingdom of God is at hand for you." But whatever town you enter, and they do not receive

*Amado Nervo, *Juana de Asbaje* (La Plata, Argentina: Editorial Calomino, 1946), p. 99.

*you — go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust from your own town that cleaves to us we shake off against you; yet know this, that the kingdom of God is at hand." ' '**

The lad who had become a Franciscan for sheer love of God and in joyful anticipation of living closer to Him, was now fired with a longing to do all these difficult things as well. He would indeed be a lifelong laborer for God's harvest, going as a "*lamb*" among the most ferocious tribes of the distant lands that were still referred to, after a century and a half, as the New World. He would enter their villages on the bare feet which were to carry him across thousands of miles of blistering deserts and rocky ranges, back and forth over the breadth of New Spain, and up and down the American continent — from Panamá in the south to the borders of Louisiana on the northeast. He would literally carry no purse, nor valuables, nor food, but eat what was placed before him while, "*lamb-like*," speaking to the "*wolves*" of the kingdom of God. He would heal bodies as well as spirits. And when occasionally the "*wolves*" would not hear him, he would shake off the dust of their towns and take leave of them, not forgetting, however, to warn them that the kingdom of God was at hand.

But first he must prepare himself, and he set about his studies happily, diligently, humbly, as always. When he was eighteen and in the midst of the philosophy course for which he had been sent to the Convento de Denia in the city of Alicante, he labored so incessantly at the lowliest drudgery that his fellow seminarians could not imagine when he found time to study. But now and then he might be seen reading a book while carrying heavy loads on his shoulders, one of the labors with which he had charged himself. His only fear in those days was that he might be betrayed by unworthy distractions; so, while performing simple, physical work, he avoided the danger of idle thoughts by keeping his mind as busy as his

*Luke 10:2-4; 8-11.

body. That was his way of carrying out his conviction that his time was God's time and not to be wasted.

Although his discipline of self was severe, he tried to escape notice for this virtue. Nevertheless, one day he was surprised by his novice master who found him with head thrust into an open grave, where he was contemplating the revolting decay and ashes of death. When the astonished priest demanded what Margil thought he was doing, the young novice replied: "I want my brute body to see just what it is!"* But for all his rather unorthodox methods of study, he managed to pass his philosophy course at the head of his class. At this time, and ever after, his name for himself was "*la misma nada*—nothing itself." The less he was *in himself*, the more he would be *of God*. To be *altogether of God* was the ideal of Margil de Jesús. He prayed constantly, and when he had been sent back to Valencia to commence his theology, he adopted the practice of going down into the monastery orchard after Matins nightly to make the Stations, a heavy cross lashed to his back. Afterward, he would continue his prayers in a little hermitage that was there. But with summer, the mosquitoes became so thick that one night he fled their ferocity without finishing his devotions. He worried over this concession to comfort and asked his director if he had done badly. Perhaps only to test him in obedience, the director counseled that he continue to pray according to his custom, tolerating the mosquitoes patiently. The next day, Margil appeared with his face so brutally swollen and inflamed from the stings he had received that to his classmates and professors "he seemed to be a monster." There was no room for doubt that this young fellow was equal to almost anything that might ever be required of a Franciscan!

*This speech and those on pp. 133, 135, and 150 are translated from Eduardo E. Ríos' *Fray Margil de Jesús* (México, D. F.: Antigua Librería Robredo de J. Porrua y Hijos, 1941).

As he had been an excellent student of philosophy, he was to prove nearly as fine a theologian. It appeared likely that he would be named professor of one of these subjects at the seminary. But if he loved books greatly, he loved people more, and in his heart that Gospel for his day of profession still lived vividly — his greatest inspiration. He could not forget that "*the harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few.*" It became increasingly clear that he must be a missionary.

* * *

Fray Margil was ordained when he was twenty-five years old and was immediately sent as a preacher to the Convento de Santa Catarina near Castellón de la Plana. There he met Fray Antonio Lináz de Jesús María, a Franciscan missionary who had spent many years in the province of Michoacán in New Spain. Fray Lináz had been hoping to collect religious to return with him to America for mission work among the dangerous savages of the still almost untouched wilderness of the Sierra Gorda, a region cutting between Querétaro and San Luís Potosí. His plan had been to recruit twelve friars for this project. But the General of the Franciscan Order in Spain held that it was wiser to by-pass Fray Lináz' idea for the time being, since he considered a dozen men too few for a successful spiritual conquest of the hordes of barbarians inhabiting the Sierra Gorda. However, he had another suggestion. He authorized Fray Lináz to recruit twenty-four *frailes* to accompany him to Querétaro with the object of founding an apostolic college at Santa Cruz, the Franciscan monastery already thriving in that city. By means of this college, and perhaps others when they could be established, it would be possible to train priests for the mission work right there in the field. The missionaries to be gained by the Order in this way would not devote themselves solely to the conver-

sion of the Sierra Gorda, but could work any place in New Spain where they might be especially needed.

This was the opportunity Fray Margil de Jesús had been waiting for; and he lost no time offering himself as one of the mission. Bidding his friends at the monastery good-bye, he returned to Valencia to ask the blessing of his now widowed mother, then took the road to Cádiz, walking barefoot as he would ever afterward. The assembled mission embarked from that port on March 4, 1683, its members being scattered among several ships of the Spanish *Flota*, or Fleet, which had booked their passage. It was the practice of that time for Spanish ships crossing the Atlantic to and from the Spanish colonies to sail together as a precaution against the pirates who infested the seas hoping to waylay the vessels and rob them of their cargoes. The vulturous crews of these brigand ships usually came from various European countries whose governments, smarting with envy of Spain's rich empire, winked at their illegal activities.

Fray Lináz and Fray Margil were very pleased to be assigned to the same ship of the *Flota*. The experienced older priest had already become especially fond of the fine student Margil de Jesús, while the enthusiastic younger Franciscan was most eager to talk with Fray Lináz about the wondrous lands toward which they were sailing. Since it was a three months' voyage and there was little enough for passengers to do on shipboard in those days of primitive navigation, Fray Margil had plenty of time to learn a great deal about New Spain from Fray Lináz. Standing at the rail, looking out over the seemingly endless blue waters, or perched on the casks and boxes cluttering the deck, the older priest spent hours describing America for Fray Margil's benefit. Thus the young missionary came to feel that he already knew the immense, green, mountainous regions of Querétaro, Michoacán and México. His loving wish to serve the Indians, who would surely be

greatly benefited by the new work about to commence for them at Santa Cruz, increased by the day. Margil was convinced that the many new missionaries to be trained in the apostolic college would greatly hasten the conversion of those tribes still unwon after a century and a half. Christian apostles of several Orders had been tireless in their devotion and self-sacrifice, but they had been too few to serve all the millions of native Americans still waiting for the Word of God.

With the passing weeks, Margil grew more and more impatient to reach the scene of his future labors. His heart was filled to overflowing one hot summer day when at last the huge land mass of the American continent finally lifted to view along the tropical horizon. As Nueva Veracruz was sighted, a number of strange ships were to be seen sailing out of the historic port. Inasmuch as they were heading not to sea but down the coast, the passengers and crews of the arriving Spanish *Flota* were unable to identify them, and soon the boats had disappeared from view.

* * *

Fray Lináz had warned of the hardships ahead. "I am offering you thorns, not comfort," he had said. "If you are reconciled to this, let us go." But even this realistic old man could not have anticipated the horror awaiting them. During that June of 1683, Veracruz was a city in acute agony, its living inhabitants maddened or stunned by a visitation of violence that surpassed imagination. Meanwhile, thousands of its citizens lay dead, their unburied bodies choking the streets and exposed to the merciless tropical sun in all stages of putrefaction.

All this had been the work of the criminals manning the ships which the *Flota* had sighted and which had actually been fleeing to the south before its arrival. They were the pirate hordes of De Gaff, Van Horn and Gramont which had swept

down on the port, torturing and robbing with indescribable depravity. During the first stage of the assault, they had driven six thousand Veracruzanos into the parish church, nailing the doors fast behind them. Inside, the panic-stricken crowd was so densely jammed that when many fainted or died of asphyxiation, their bodies did not drop but remained erect from the pressure of those about them. The only entrance left unbarred was a small sacristy door which the pirates guarded so vigilantly that no one escaped. From this opening, the murderers ridiculed and taunted the suffering multitude, sometimes beating and breaking the bones of those unfortunate enough to be within reach.

After two days of this terror, during which time the houses and buildings of the city had all been sacked, De Gaff entered the church, cutting a path through the people with his sword. He forced everyone to surrender what money and jewels they happened to have on their persons, stripped the house of God of its valuables, and encouraged his men in other unthinkable injuries to the starving, thirsting, choking victims, many of whom lost their minds during the siege. The only hope of those who survived from one day to the next was the knowledge that the Spanish Fleet was due at any moment. But the days had dragged on and with them this nightmare of crime and violence. It was only after some three weeks, when the *Flota* was finally seen against the blue reaches of the Gulf, that the pirates ceased their brutalities and abandoned the city in a clean getaway.

As the *Flota* stood off awaiting orders to enter port, a messenger who had somehow managed to elude the bandits and secure a boat, came aboard the commander's ship to relate what had occurred in the city. The shocked passengers could hardly find words to express their horror and sympathy, but it is said that Fray Margil was heard to murmur reverently: "God help us, we are in the Indies!"

Disembarking on June 6, the Franciscans found a city in ruins. Not a single house could be seen intact, either rich or poor. The air was poisoned by decaying bodies. As the friars filed sorrowfully through the corpse-cluttered streets to the Monastery of San Francisco, Fray Margil de Jesús wept. It mattered not that San Francisco had been left nothing to offer the new arrivals save a few beans. The thing now was to minister to the dead and to give all possible spiritual aid to the distracted Veracruzanos who had escaped with their lives.

Only after some days, when it seemed that matters were being brought under control, did the saddened missionaries prepare to continue their journey.

"We shall now separate, Brothers," instructed Fray Lináz. "That is to say, we shall proceed two by two along varied routes up to the city of Puebla de los Angeles where we shall meet again. In this way our group will gain a wider knowledge of the towns and peoples of different districts. Perhaps, too, we may be able to benefit a greater number of the faithful. Afterward we can each tell our experiences to the whole company, and this should be edifying. From Puebla, we shall continue on to the capital and from there to our Monastery of Santa Cruz in Querétaro."

So this is how they started out, in pairs, carrying only their crucifixes, breviaries and staffs. These men of God would follow His order literally: "*Whatever town you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you.*"

Fray Margil de Jesús and the companion to whom he had been assigned turned their faces inland, setting their bare feet bravely upon the long road that was to lead them through cities founded by earlier Franciscans — Córdoba, Orizaba, Tehuacán and Tepeaca. There would be a great mountain range to cross before Puebla and the certainty of others beyond, for that city was not even a halfway mark to Querétaro. It was the rainy season and their only assurance of shelter and

food on this arduous journey was a deep faith in their Creator. Nevertheless, Fray Margil knew that he had never been so happy in all his happy life!

During the long years ahead, how many times would he not recall this first comparatively insignificant hike, a mere two hundred miles from Veracruz to Puebla! As his bare, cruelly scarred feet rapidly covered thousands of miles, north, south, east, west, year in and year out, on countless journeys that were to keep him thin in figure, ragged of habit, how could the intrepid missionary ever forget this first peaceful, jubilant jaunt? Impossible! The tropical jungles of the coastland, the levels of productive green ground rising steadily away from the sea, the towering peaks ahead, soon to be dwarfed by the shimmering snowcap of Orizaba — these eye-filling contrasts formed his earliest impression of the grandeur with which God had blessed this magnificent America. But even more than the beauty of the earth would he recall his first, fresh delight in the courteous, dusky-faced peasants whose native soil it was. No, he had never been so happy! He wished to give all of himself to everyone he met. He wished to give Our Lord to every soul he encountered. How else could he possibly express his profound gratitude?

Not far outside the port, he and his companion, whom history does not name, ran across a band of *arrieros*, drivers of the mule trains by means of which most of the heavy cartage was managed in New Spain. These drivers were on their way to México City. For many miles, Fray Margil helped them with their animals, talking and laughing with them cheerily. And so doing, they came to the outskirts of the pueblo called Cotaxtla.

* * *

"Whatever is the racket outside in the plaza, Rosita, my little daughter? There must be many gathered to set up such a hubbub."

"*¿Sí, Mamá*, they are many. Everyone of the town is in the street. I can see from the window here. Someone, some señor, is singing. Do you not hear? The song sounds very sweet, like a holy litany. But I can't hear it well above the talking and shouting. And I can't see who is singing either. Do come tell me what it may be, *Mamacita!*"

"Strangers must have entered our *pueblito* by the high road from the port, *bijita*. Let me see," and the kindly village housewife peered through the carved wooden window bars above the small Rosita.

"Do you think it is the soldiers, *Mamá*, or a great one from across the sea going up to *la capital*? The people would not all go out in the sun for less, I think."

"The song says 'no,' little one. The soldiers do not sing so sweetly, nor the *ricos*. But wait — I can see something above the heads. Holy Virgin, it is Our Lord Himself, His image, raised aloft on a pole or staff! Then of a certainty it must be holy men whom Cotaxtla receives today. *Ay!* this is like the old times our grandmothers used to describe, when the *padres* were continually passing through from the port, walking, walking, always *descalzos*, bringing their blessing to all the land!"

"But of course, *Mamacita*, now I can see them for the *gente* are beginning to kneel. There are two *padres* in the *hábitos* of our dearest San Francisco. I do not see well their faces, but the one ahead is the singer. It is for this and the blessing that the people are on their knees. May we go out to hear the song, to receive the blessing? *Ay, Mamá*, may we?"

"*Cómo no, bijita mía?* We surely shall go out and see them. What a pity that your grandmother should have missed it, the glory of this day that brings us the holy friars again just

as in the old times. *Vámanos!* You shall tell your own children just how they were and of what they spoke, Rosita *mía*. Hurry!"

* * *

Entering Cotaxtla, their habits smeared with mud and their feet bruised and mud-caked (for it had rained all night on their walking), the two Franciscans had raised aloft the crucifixes attached to their long staffs, and Fray Margil had sung the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Now the Cotaxtlecans were pious villagers and they were accustomed to entertain clerical deputations. But it had been a long time since friars had walked into their town so humbly and so awesomely too — exactly in the manner of the venerated Fray Pedro de Gante, Fray Martín de Valencia and Fray Motolinía. All mud and rags and spirit they were, as those others had been from their ceaseless tramping and toils more than a century before. The sudden reminder of that beloved Mexican tradition, the wandering *fraile*, stirred in the townsfolk a pride not unmixed with reverential fear. No wonder that everyone had poured into the street to see; that almost all had soon found themselves on their knees. There was joy in the knowledge that now there would be preaching and devotions before these holy men would continue on their way, renewed by such refreshment as the unprepared citizens were able to offer — on toward the towns of Santiago Huatusco, San Lorenzo de los Negros and Córdoba. For the pueblo would be renewed also, through the singing, the preaching and the blessings of the padres, who would then go as they had come, walking, walking, singing, preaching. How good that they had passed this way! It was a sign of God's favor to Cotaxtla, and there would be pious talk of it for months!

No, indeed, Fray Margil could never forget this first joyous tramp across the land through all sorts of weather. He would remember the June afternoon downpours that made such a slippery business of the red clay trails and those of gray adobe. For him there would be no fading of that sight of emerald pastures steaming under the early sun as they trudged ahead steadily, taking full advantage of the clear, serene, blue-vaulted Mexican mornings. He would not forget, either, the kindly faces — brown, white, and every shade between. At least these he first saw were civilized faces, yes, civilized *now*, thanks to men of his kind who had passed this way so long before himself, thanks to such spirits as Pedro de Gante and Motolinía. Months and years hence when he would enter other villages, filthy mud-and-wattle clusterings housing the vermin-infested, cannibalistic Lacandones, the truculent, bitter Huicholes, he would surely recall with gratitude all these amiable, peaceful, pious folk! What they *now were* would remain a symbol, a standard toward which, with God's help, he might raise the savages to whom he would minister for the next forty-three years — a career which was to become a saga in México.

* * *

When they had all met again in Puebla, Fray Lináz and his recruits pushed on to México, entering the city at the end of June as had that other famous first mission headed by Martín de Valencia. Exactly a hundred and sixty years separated these two significant June arrivals, but so vast was New Spain that even after so long a time and all the labors of six generations of friars, its mighty mountains and canyons still cut off thousands of Indian settlements which had yet to see a Christian missionary. It seemed incredible but it was true, and this knowledge served as a warning that no matter how hard they worked, they too could never do enough!

After a short rest, Fray Lináz, who had detaining business in the capital, sent the group on before him to Querétaro bearing the Papal Bull, the royal order, and the letters from the Franciscan General which authorized the establishment of the new college at Santa Cruz. Here, Fray Margil arrived with the others in August. By this time he knew a great deal about this fascinating land but not as much as he intended to know. Though he now had a home in America, in Querétaro, he probably sensed that he was not destined to spend much time in it. However, for a short period he devoted himself to preaching in the city, walking its picturesque streets that were already old, singing his famous litanies and hymns, and sharing his happiness in Our Lord with all who heard him. Very soon he had gained renown as an exceedingly holy *fraile*, and the Queretareños commenced to neglect their *fiestas*, bull fights, and various social doings, so that they might have time to follow him about.

Before the close of the year, he had been sent to preach missions in México City and other centers; and early in 1684, he tramped back down to Veracruz to board a boat bound for Campeche and Yucatán. With him now was Fray Melchór López de Jesús who would share his mission labors during many weary travels throughout all those wild territories known to us today as the Central American countries — Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and right up to the borders of Panamá.

Neither Fray Margil nor Fray Melchór cared to remain in Mérida, Yucatán's center of population. These settled, domestic people were not the "*wolves*" they had come seeking to warn of the approach of the kingdom of God, nor the ones they felt they had been commanded to suffer for and to cure. Later they would take their part in the organization of the new Franciscan apostolic colleges, but right now there was mission work to be done that should not be delayed. They were so

sure of this that they asked permission to set out together on a tour of Guatemala. This granted, they returned to Campeche. From here they would take a boat to Tabasco since there were no overland routes between these two points which were separated by unexplored swamps. After some little confusion and one false start, the two friends got under way at last on the great adventure for which they had crossed a wide ocean and already walked altogether more than twelve hundred miles!

This was the first of many long journeys that Fray Margil and Fray Melchór would make alone together, far from their brothers in religion and through utterly unknown territories, many of which are even today almost unthinkable dangerous for the foot traveler. They were heading into uncharted jungles which literally crawled with deadly snakes and poisonous insects, which were populated with fierce animals and, in some places, fiercer aborigines. They would have to cross mountains and undergo extreme heat in the lowlands. There would be deluges of rain and flooded rivers to master.

How did they prepare for this precarious trip? Well, in a material sense, they didn't. They prayed, of course, and they carried with them the confidence that they were on a mission, for which God would give them strength if they followed His *exact rule* in these matters. Had He not said that what they needed would be supplied by those who would hear them? They were blessed with a trust that this would apply in the wilderness as well as in the civilized places of the earth. He had not indicated that there was one rule for Palestine and another for Guatemala!

In Tabasco at the start of the journey, they found few Christians and little or no interest in religion. Though endowed with tropical beauty in abundance, this section possessed all the drawbacks of jungle land and little to lure the gold-hungry colonists or even the simpler and more substantial people, ranchers and tradesmen. Such few Spaniards as had

located there, as well as the Indians, were peculiarly apathetic about their spiritual salvation, and recalling the instructions for this situation, the *frailles* went on after leaving their "notice" of the approach of the kingdom.

The distance to Santiago de los Caballeros was in the neighborhood of a thousand miles, much of it largely uncharted! But the missionaries were not appalled. For some time they followed the course of the Grijalva River, living almost entirely on the bananas and wild fruits to be found in abundance, and the chocolate they made from cacao seeds; enduring the incredible swarms of mosquitoes, gnats and other stinging insects; sleeping under the open sky when night fell. They took turns at this, each sleeping only about half the night while the other kept vigil on his knees before his crucifix.

Trudging ahead by day, they soon came to realize why it had been said that "one league in Tabasco is equal to three in Spain." It was necessary to proceed slowly over the broken trails — when indeed there *were* any trails at all. But their bare feet kept moving down the huge continent, southward and eastward, following the contour of the land. A month of this and they were bearded and thin, their habits soiled and ragged. However, they were never disgusted, discouraged or in low spirits. They lost their discomfort and loneliness in prayer and song. They raised wooden crosses on the heights they must ascend, and standing before these, they chanted:

"I adore you, Holy Cross,
Placed on Mount Calvary;
On you, my Jesus died
To give me eternal light
And free me from evil."*

*Translated from the Spanish original, which is quoted by Eduardo Enrique Ríos, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Singing as they trod the earth, they found it possible to forget their hunger, their weariness and their occasional physical ills. Of course, all through Christian history other friars too had sung and prayed for such reasons; but Fray Margil de Jesús and Fray Melchór would always sing, with or without the need for comfort. They sang in the wilderness and they sang in the towns. Particularly did they enter the towns singing, for gratitude. Though they never would speak of the privations and infirmities they had endured on their trips, it is known that on this one they came into the colonial town of Tuxtla in Chiapas almost unable to keep on their feet. Their condition was so shocking that the residents immediately ordered their coffins! And for some days they certainly appeared to be dying; although now and then they would also revive slightly. The doctor advised that they be taken to the town of Chiapa for its better air. Chiapa was not far from Tuxtla, but the trip was painfully slow since the emaciated priests had to be carried in hammocks attached to poles fitted across the shoulders of the bearers. On the way, Fray Margil was seen to be so near death that he was given the Last Sacraments. But both Franciscans remained serene, content in whatever might be God's will. Arrived at Chiapa, they were taken into the home of an important citizen, where their beds had been prepared. Even so, neither failed to say Mass daily. The wife of their host was so affected by the holiness and diligence of Fray Margil that she offered to God, for his recovery, the life of one of her own children!

But it was not God's will that the two priests die in Chiapa nor at this time. They were about "His business." During their long convalescence, they won the hearts of the entire countryside. Their spiritual conquest of the Indians was so complete that for many years whenever a Franciscan would appear in the neighborhood of Chiapa or Tuxtla, the natives went out to meet him with flowers and gifts, caring only that he was of

the same Order as Fray Margil and Fray Melchór, whom they ever afterward referred to as saints.

When they had recovered sufficiently to take the road again, the missionaries proceeded to the old Spanish city of Ciudad Real (now San Cristóbal de las Casas), where the climate was cool on account of the higher altitude. This aided in their restoration to full health. And in this city they gave a mission which was enthusiastically attended. The preaching and example of the two missionaries won countless souls. From here on their fame was such that it preceded them from place to place, so that they always found the people waiting for them in joy and thanksgiving. Thus, in these parts there was no need to undergo too difficult privations. However, after they had crossed out of Chiapas into the Province of Soconusco, they found the Indians painfully poor. But these, too, flocked to hear and follow the *frailes* in multitudes of three and four thousand, bearing aloft tree branches so that wherever they went, it seemed that they moved under a forest. So great was the harvest of souls in Soconusco and so great the need of the people, that Fray Margil and his beloved brother in religion spent close to a year among them. And when at last the two felt compelled to continue on their way to the Guatemalan capital, they were still followed by throngs of Indians, who gladly shared their all with the holy men whom they loved so much. Never alone now for so much as a moment, they covered all the long miles, arriving at Santiago a year and five months after leaving Tabasco. Hours after they had entered the beloved city of Hermano Pedro de Betancourt, its great churches and cemeteries were still jammed with those who had formed the "escort" of the friars.

As the two travelers proceeded to the Episcopal palace to report to His Excellency the Bishop of Guatemala, it was noted that they had not bothered to change their habits. In this same disreputable clothing they also continued on to pay their respect

to the Captain General before visiting the cathedral. This was how they had walked and worked for God. Why should they seek to present a more elegant front to the authorities here below? They ignored the smiles and the pity, too, that their appearance produced in the prosperous Santiagüños. Nowhere in the New World was the life of the religious more ample and luxurious than in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. The humble Hermano Pedro de Betancourt had now been dead for some score of years, and perhaps Fray Margil thought it was again time to show this place some authentic Christian poverty!

They fulfilled several missions for their Provincial in this capital and then turned their compassion to the service of a population suddenly convulsed by the plague. For this deadly infection there was no sure remedy since what helped some seemed to make others worse. Soon the people began to declare that the stricken who heard the words of these two *frayles* recovered, on the average, much oftener than those who did not. But however it was, the day came when Margil and Melchór again set their faces to the south. As they left Santiago, their program was the same as before, except that now the lands they traversed were even wilder and less inhabited than those above the city. Down through Honduras and Nicaragua and into Costa Rica they trod the lonely land — singing, preaching, praying. In the towns populated by Europeans or their descendants, they were received reverently as messengers of God. In the wilderness, they took their chances. Sometimes there were kindly Indians to feed them, sometimes not. Often they existed for days on herbs and the chocolate they had learned to make by grinding the wild cacao seeds and mixing the powder with cold water. Days came when they could find no food at all! They didn't complain. And in these deep, quiet places, they drew closer and closer to their Master.

Cartago was the last town of any size or claim to civilization in Costa Rica. When its residents went out to meet Fray Margil and Fray Melchór, they offered them the compliment of doing so in *their* bare feet! And when they arrived at Cartago's Franciscan monastery, their own weary feet, which had plodded so many hundreds of miles to pay this apostolic visit, were tenderly washed by the sacristan. Now they had really arrived at the "jumping-off place." To the south lay only the mysterious earthly hell of the Talamanca Indians.

* * *

"It is certain there has been no religious, even of our Order, in the land of the Talamancas for a hundred and eighteen years," Fray Margil remarked to Fray Melchór one morning in 1689 after their more than five years' journey had brought them to Cartago.

"True. Fray Pedro de Betanzos was the last *fraille* to approach these tribes, and he was killed by the poor savages who still hold the mountains to the south."

"'Poor' is the right word, dear brother. These Talamancas are poor in spirit, and unbelievably poor in all the necessities of life. It is said they have not sufficient to eat."

"That is because it rains almost daily in their country," observed Fray Melchór thoughtfully. "The ground stays too wet for growing. I hear they live entirely on bananas and yucca with only now and then a bit of wild game — deer and sometimes fish. They do not see corn. They go naked and have no comforts at all. It is a hard fate. I have prayed Our Lord about them."

"And what has He told you?" asked Fray Margil with a little smile.

"What has He told *you*, my softhearted friend?"

"The same," chuckled the happy missionary whose boyhood had been spent in far-away Valencia.

"Shall we start soon, Margil?"

"*Cómo no?* How else can we possibly share what they have? Or how deliver the Good News?"

* * *

The Talamancas were indeed naked, but they did not go unarmed. Great bows and arrows they carried, and a peculiarly intense hatred for the Spanish who had conquered so many of their fellow indigenes in America. Though Don Rodrigo de Maldonado had once brought them under control, there were not many men of that caliber, and more than a generation had now passed since the campaigns had been more or less abandoned. The fiercely resistant Talamancas had reverted to their own ways, or worse, for they were warned now and always lay in wait for the white man. They were obsessed by fear of slavery and desired nothing but to be left alone. They lived out their miserable lives in independent if abject poverty; they worshiped idols. They practiced polygamy and were addicted to a crudely prepared alcoholic drink. This was all that was known of them, but it was quite enough for the Franciscans. They were soon on the road again, climbing the mountain wall to the south.

That Fray Margil was so often successful in reaching the hearts of the fiercest savages before whom other friars fell martyred, was due to his method, which was literally *the Method* set forth in the Gospel passage that had inspired his whole Franciscan career. This was how it worked: As soon as he had contacted any member of a strange tribe, he always quietly and reasonably requested a meeting with its head men. This arranged, he communicated the heart of his message to

the chiefs. "*The kingdom of God is at hand.*" Graciously he asked their permission to explain what he meant by this. His personal charm and cheerful manner influenced many in his favor. And once they allowed him to come close to them, to instruct them, the barbarians accepted his teachings. They readily saw him for what he was, a holy man, strangely satisfied to be one with them in their poverty and misery. They soon understood, too, that he possessed a great secret which lightened the burden of this poverty and misery, a secret which kept him laughing and singing through the worst troubles. Naturally, they wondered about it, and in their curiosity they listened. That was all he needed.

Of course, despite his great faith and his knowledge that he was fulfilling God's will, Fray Margil de Jesús did not expect to prevail always. But when his times of failure would come, he had Our Lord's orders for that situation, too. By following them in the sequence intended, he would preserve his life and usefulness for many long years where numbers of other diligent, self-sacrificing priests were unable to obtain this success.

In the Talamanca adventure he won out, aided, of course, by Fray Melchór. When he perceived how the tribesmen feared the Spaniards, he sought and received official guarantees from the government that the capture or molestation of the Indians would be prohibited. Colonists would not be permitted to draw upon that nation for labor. This settled, he set to work building little mission chapels in fifteen or more places for his new friends and their children. These structures were made of tree trunks and branches. Tabernacles were fashioned of cane, flowers and feathers. The rustic chapels insured that, when he and Fray Melchór would have to take leave of these poor, undernourished, but now partly converted creatures of God, all would be prepared for the arrival of resident friars who would shortly be assigned to the district.

What they had accomplished in such short time was, very simply, *a work of love*. The Indians knew this and reciprocated that love. Love is always the key to understanding. Although one Costa Rican governor was to write of the Talamancas: "They have no goods at all and are exceedingly destitute and lazy. . . . Their conduct, tendencies and control are brutish, and they are very cowardly,"* Fray Margil was able to state sincerely of the same people: "They are very docile and affectionate: their manner of life among themselves is very peaceful and loving and the little that they have is shared by all."** This is how his love had found them. It was to leave them vastly improved in morals and possessed of at least a dawning recognition of Christian truth.

After this ministry to the Talamancas, Fray Margil was to face several opportunities to deal with another type of reaction. He would be met with rancor and abuse by those to whom he would carry the Word. He would learn about frustration and failure in this business of winning savage hearts for God. It was February, 1691, when the companion friars set out from San Miguel de Cabec, a south-coast pueblo in one of the few fertile regions of the Talamancas, with the object of preaching through the adjacent territory belonging to the Ujambor tribe. At the outset of the trip, they were accompanied by a group of Cabeceras who had agreed to guide them as far as the borders of the Ujambor country.

No more than midway into this first phase of the trip, they entered the settlement of San José to discover that its little church had been burned by raiding Indians, the inhabitants of the *palenques* — or pre-historic edifices — in the mountain heights above this section. The desecrated chapel was one of their own establishments. Fray Margil and Fray Melchór gave expression to their sorrow by stripping off their habits,

*Ríos, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

***Ibid.*

covering their heads with ashes and donning hair shirts, after which, in the presence of their sympathetic Indian guides, they made the Stations of the Cross, weeping. The day following, they rebuilt the little chapel and then determined to climb the cliffs to the *palenques* to preach to the vandals. In this daring project, they refused to expose the native guides. If this was to be hostility, they would face it alone. Even without this *palenque* side trip, there had been small doubt in the minds of the Talamancas that this expedition would result fatally for the Franciscans.

"Where do you wish your bodies to be buried, my Father?" Juan Antonio, their interpreter, had asked Fray Margil even before their departure from San Miguel de Cabec.

"If God grants us so much mercy, we wish to be buried in San Miguel," he had replied; and forthwith they had set out, content in the conviction that they were performing the will of God. Now the two lone men bade farewell to their grieving escorts and proceeded to scale the heights of the opposition.

When they had arrived at the first *palenque*, they found it deserted. They remained there during the rest of the day and through one long, black night. At this place they discovered a *tambor*, or drum, and this they beat in accompaniment to the hymns with which they broke the dead silence of the mountain fastness. The hostile Indians could not be far away, but no one appeared.

In the morning they continued on to an inhabited place where they sighted some women hiding in the underbrush, apparently preparing to flee. Approaching the houses of the chiefs, they found the doors barred. But the savages soon recovered their boldness and began to surround them, both the men and the women armed with sticks and lances. "When we showed them the holy Christ," wrote Fray Margil later, "they spit and turned their faces away so as not to see Him; and throwing things, they broke the image to pieces." It was

enough. Ignoring the commotion, the cries and the blows offered them by the frantic pagans, the *frailes* quitted this place, continuing on to other *palenques* only to suffer more or less the same treatment. They spoke to these unhappy creatures with all the strength and grace that God gave them, but it was useless. Each time they were pushed and struck more violently, and finally one blow hit the face of the crucifix. No more was necessary to convince the missionaries that these mountain people had no wish to hear the Word of God. Thus, for the first time they had to act upon the final part of the Gospel instruction. Warning their attackers as well as they could of the approach of the kingdom, they calmly and literally stamped the dust of the settlement from their travel-scarred feet and sorrowfully withdrew to the regions of the Cabeceras. The wonder was that they were permitted to retire without serious injury. Many had been killed for less.

They had received God's help in many great works, and they had followed His instructions to the letter. Resting in this knowledge, they had apparently not even thought of the fact that the Palenques in their fury might harm them seriously. Strangely enough, they had been allowed to make their point and simply walk off! This was faith, the faith that would continue to work miracles for Fray Margil de Jesús through many long years ahead.

Later that same year, 1691, the two missionaries received a letter ordering them back to Querétaro. They had walked thousands of leagues to reach and preach to the fifteen tribes of Talamancas. They had baptized hundreds of Indians, built churches. And now they obediently turned once again to the north to sing and preach their way back to Santa Cruz.

* * *

All that has been told here of Fray Margil's work in America is but an introduction of his long life of service. In

more or less the same manner, he was to go ahead for thirty-five more years, although he was soon to lose the company of his beloved Fray Melchór, who would be given individual assignments and, fulfilling them, die before long. For a time Margil de Jesús would walk and sing and toil alone though not always. He would carry the Gospel to the Choles, the Lacandones and other tribes of the south; he would take time out to found and serve the apostle-training center of La Recolectión in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala and another at Zacatecas, México; and he would, as an old man, establish missions as far north as San Antonio, Texas; would teach and preach as far east as Louisiana! Trudging back and forth across the land, he would expose his poor, forever-bare feet, as black now as an Indian's, to countless thousands of rough miles. While he was so doing, his journeyings would become legend, would begin to take on a miraculous quality. For one thing, no one else in history had ever walked so far *so fast*. He is said to have made some of his trips in a fourth of the best time the colonists could accept as naturally possible. And on one occasion it was known that although he had set out from a given point *after* a party of mounted travelers he had somehow passed them, so that they were astounded to catch up with him later at a village where he had stopped to talk and pray. Even so, he still arrived before them at their mutual destination!

One day while traveling with a brother Franciscan and an Indian, the latter sustained an accident in which his finger was completely severed from his hand. Fray Margil was well ahead, as usual, but the other friar called him back to inspect the wounded man, who was bleeding dangerously. Gently setting the finger back in its place, Fray Margil bound up the injured hand. When it was seen that the bleeding had stopped, they continued on their way. Shortly after, joyful cries from behind informed the hastening Margil that the hand was as good as new and the finger functioning normally. There were

other miraculous cures attributed to him, but this seems to have been the most dramatic. Thus, during his ministry Fray Margil de Jesús was able to comply with every phrase of the Gospel instructions to the apostles. One of these had been: *"Cure the sick."*

There would be another failure — this one with México's Huicholes — as well as innumerable successes. Fray Margil would serve his Order in various capacities, including that of superior of the missionary college at Zacatecas, to which office he was appointed in 1706. He would evangelize the northern deserts of México and establish in Texas the mission stations of Guadalupe, San Miguel and Dolores.

The labors and exposures of a desperately hard life never dimmed the happy spirit or dismayed the grateful heart of this magnificent Franciscan, who died in México City in 1726 at the age of seventy-one. It is testified that hundreds who came to pay respect and reverence to him before his body was interred, noticed that his feet, battered and abused for so many years, had whitened and become as soft and unscarred as a baby's. In 1836, a hundred and ten years after his death, the cause of Antonio Margil de Jesús was approved by the College of Cardinals and the Holy Father in Rome and he was thereupon honored with the title of Venerable, which opens the way to his eventual canonization.



IX. THE FIRST CALIFORNIAN

AT THIS point the reader probably feels that there must have been an almost astronomical number of Indians standing in need of Christian conversion in New Spain. There were. At the beginning of the Conquest, there had been millions; and even after two centuries of ceaseless evangelizing by the Franciscans and other great missionary Orders which had followed them to America, there were still tens of thousands of pagans who had yet to hear of Jesus Christ! Of course, these were the peoples living in the more remote "corners" of Spain's vast colonial Empire, in regions which had been but lightly touched by that Empire's exploring admirals and land forces. One of these places was Alta, or Upper, California.

Baja, Lower, California had been known to the conquerors from very early times. Cortés himself had gone there in 1533, but finding nothing of value or of very much interest, he had looked upon it as a convenient base for future explorations rather than as a territory favorable to colonization. Baja California was unspeakably hot and dry. Most of it was uncultivable. Apparently its stark mountains hid no golden veins to tempt the metal-hungry Spaniards. Its natives were poor, undeniably dreary and, compared with the mainland tribes, few in number. They showed no signs of any such abilities as Cortés had found among the Aztecs, the Mayas or the Tarascans. To use a modern phrase, there seemed to be little future in Baja California, which at that time was thought to be an island. Nevertheless, the mysterious seas to the north and whatever lands might border them, never ceased to fascinate the explorers. They still believed they would find a strait in that direction to carry them through to the rich Spice Islands, for which Columbus had really been searching when he had stumbled upon the New World. So, in 1542 Cortés

had dispatched Juan Cabrillo to sail up the California coast and prepare a report on whatever he might discover. This hardy navigator succeeded in reaching the harbor of San Diego in Alta California, where the land was found to be green and fertile, in striking contrast to the parched wastes of Baja California. However, the Indians of this section were even poorer than those of the south since, knowing nothing of agriculture, they made no use of the soil. They owned nothing worth mentioning save their well-made canoes. With these they obtained the fish which was their principal food. Cabrillo died at sea on this voyage, but his explorations put California on the map of the world.

About the same time, Francisco Ulloa had sailed up the inland Gulf to the mouth of the Colorado River, dispelling the notion that Baja California was an island. Clearly, it was a long peninsula attached to the great land body of America.

England's Sir Francis Drake had touched the shores of Alta California about 1570 — the hold of his famed ship, *The Golden Hind*, loaded with treasure he had looted in his raids on the South-American coast cities. This peerless pirate blithely laid claim to the land in the name of Queen Elizabeth, calling it New Albion. But even so talented a plunderer could find nothing of more value to carry off to his admiring ruler than an Indian headdress which he had brazenly declared to be "the crown of California," and which he said was "forwarded" to Elizabeth by the obliging natives in token of their submission to her sovereignty! Thus, even as he was christening the place New Albion, he had openly acknowledged its legendary Spanish title, California!

There had been other explorations, including that of Cermeno, whose chaplain, the Franciscan priest Francisco de la Concepción, had said Alta California's first Mass in 1597; and, in 1602, that of Vizcaíno, who had been ordered by the Mexican Viceroy, El Conde de Monterrey, to extend

the discoveries and select favorable sites for settlement. The second Mass was celebrated near San Diego; then Vizcaíno pushed his ships as far north as the bay he had called Monterey in honor of his sponsor. To identify this place for future explorers, he ordered that a cross be raised. In his report to the government, he was able to include information on the Santa Barbara Islands and the inhabitants of the Channel region. But although his voyage had added to the general knowledge and had made possible an accurate map of great reaches of California's coast, there had been no enthusiasm or money to colonize a land where no riches nor wonders had yet been seen.

It appears that history was waiting for religious to write the California story; and the first chapter would concern Baja California only. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, a group of Jesuit missionaries under Father Salvatierra arrived on the peninsula at the expense of their Society. Their simple aim was the quest for Indian souls and the building of missions. Considering the appalling poverty of the territory and the backwardness of its inhabitants, their success was noteworthy. They soon won a fairly large number of Indians to their missions, perhaps partly by feeding them better than the natives had ever been able to feed themselves. These, the Jesuits catechized with care and baptized. They taught the women to weave; and they *tried* to teach the scandalously lazy men to till the fields. They introduced irrigation. Their admirable work continued for some seventy years or until that fateful day in 1767 when a secret edict of Charles III struck as a thunderbolt, wiping out all their work! The Jesuit Society was expelled from Spain and Spanish possessions in the New World! This mystifying act of the monarch seemed and still seems to have been totally unjust. Nevertheless, the Jesuits obeyed the cruel mandate, departing in silence, although it meant abandoning all their hard-won foundations and leaving

their thousands of terrified neophytes to face an unknown future in widely-separated places!

* * *

More than half a century before the expulsion of the Jesuits, a lad of rare brilliance had been born in the town of Petra on the Spanish Island of Mallorca. Baptized Miguel José Serra on the day of his birth, November 24, 1713, he grew up during the period when the Jesuits were first laboring to convert the natives of that faraway American peninsula called Baja California. The Franciscan priests of Petra's San Bernardino were the teachers who prepared Miguel José for his later education at the capital city of Palma where, in 1731, he made his profession as a Franciscan, taking the name of Junípero in honor of St. Francis' beloved disciple. He was ordained probably in 1738. Though his great ambition had always been to go as a missionary to the American pagans, his superiors, — who probably realized that few were endowed with his intellectual gifts while almost all of their friars possessed the valiance and self-abnegation demanded to teach catechism to the New World aborigines — had first appointed Junípero Serra librarian at San Francisco and, after three years, a professor of philosophy. From October, 1743, he held the chair of Scotus on the theological faculty of Palma's distinguished Lullian University.

All this time, Fray Junípero, while filling his posts brilliantly, continued to pray that his missionary dream might still come true. It proved to be a long test, which only made its final attainment the sweeter. God heard his prayers, and in 1749, when he was thirty-six years old, he was permitted to embark with a Franciscan mission for New Spain! His joy was the greater that Fray Francisco Palóu, his closest friend and former student, was going with him.

The crossing from Cádiz to Veracruz took an exceptionally long time — ninety-nine days. Even the vessels of the preceding century had been accustomed to do it in less. On board the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* were twenty-one Franciscans and six Dominican friars, who were to endure extreme discomfort. The ship's slow progress reduced its food stores dangerously, and even the water ran out before the sighting of Puerto Rico, the first chance for replenishment. Fray Junípero overcame his thirst as always he would triumph over his body. When asked later whether he had not suffered intensely from lack of drinking water, he said: "Not particularly. I soon discovered that to eat little and talk less is a remedy for this distress."

Things must have seemed much brighter for the *frailes* as they left Puerto Rico on the last and lesser portion of their voyage, but if so their encouragement was short-lived. Before Veracruz, there was a violent Gulf storm to ride out, in which the little boat was thrown far off her course and badly damaged. Each of the friars promptly wrote upon a slip of paper the name of the saint in whose intercession he felt most confidence. The slips were placed in a bowl from which a drawing was made. The winner, Santa Barbara. Their jubilant cry went up to the wind-strafted heavens: "Viva Santa Barbara!" And thereafter, the threats of gale and wave were trustfully left to this great guardian of arms and fortifications. As anticipated, Santa Barbara protected them all the way to port as she would later protect the California mission to be named for her, against the buffetings and ill winds of an entirely different sort of tempest, in which her sister missions would suffer grievous damage.

* * *

It was no longer the custom of the friars to do their traveling afoot on the longest and hardest journeys. True, St.

Francis had prohibited his first followers the comforts of four-footed locomotion, but he could hardly have foreseen America and the incredible distances his later-day followers would be called upon to cover just to reach their stations. And moreover, it was now the middle of the eighteenth century and it would not be long until speed itself would become a standard requirement throughout the world. However, Fray Junípero was determined to walk from the port to México City as had the early Franciscan missionary heroes — even though only one of his companions could be persuaded to accompany him.

His austerity on this occasion had painful results, for en route he suffered the bite (variously reported as that of a snake and a poisonous insect) which, becoming infected and ulcerous, was to cripple him for life. But he refused to bow before this mishap and on December 31, trudged into La Villa de Guadalupe, where he spent the night and said Mass on New Year's day in honor of the celebrated *Virgen Morena** at her shrine. The same day he walked into the capital as had those stalwarts before him — Pedro de Gante, the twelve of Fray Martín de Valencia's party, El Beato Sebastián de Aparicio, and Fray Margil de Jesús — albeit much more painfully. At the College of San Fernando, he was welcomed with joy, his fame for scholarship and preaching having preceded him.

Because he had crossed the sea to carry the Gospel to the heathen, the first five months in México City before he was given a field assignment were a heavy trial to Serra. He was a very holy man and willing enough to accept hardship and suffering in the name of Our Lord. But his was scarcely a social temperament, and certainly he did not feel like being sociable with the vain and ostentatious *Capitalinos*. He was particularly annoyed that the sophisticated gentry showed themselves so mindful of their "creature-comforts" that the society ladies even persisted in having their hot chocolate served to them in

*Our Lady of Guadalupe.

church! There had never been such "goings-on" in Mallorca. He was quite sure that the most atrocious sins of the unaffected pagans would be more endurable than the peccadilloes of these wealthy, brash and self-indulgent colonists!

The Sierra Gorda, of legendary fame for the hostility of its savages and the rigors of its climate and terrain, was still a rugged mission field in 1750. This was the region Fray Lináz had so wished to evangelize and one of the few places where Fray Margil de Jesús had found it necessary, before departing, to "*brush off the dust against those who would not hear.*" Fray Junípero's first mission post was among the Pame Indians of the Sierra Gorda. He accepted it with the greatest joy he had yet known in the New World, his happiness heightened because Father Palóu was to be his companion in this work. Together they walked the two hundred miles to Santiago de Xalpan, arriving there on June 1.

For Junípero Serra it was a thrilling new adventure, although actually it was the same old missionary story retold one more time — the labor to learn a strange Indian tongue in which to write a simple catechism, preach, instruct and *know* one's flock. He also taught the natives Spanish and how to sing the Mass, that they might feel they had a responsible and important part in the wondrous mysteries which he revealed to them by means of colorful and understandable, if crude, paintings. These were but the banners that could be carried in the processions, always so attractive to the childlike Indian hearts. He built the church that is still in use at Xalpan, keeping it bright with greenery, its altar brighter with candle glow. There was no lack of exciting religious festivals.

On the temporal side, the priests from the agricultural island paradise of Mallorca were well equipped to improve the native farming methods; and the Pames, still a most difficult tribe, found themselves enjoying a heretofore unknown

security after coming in to the mission to live and work together co-operatively. The women were soon weaving decent clothing for their families and feeling very superior about it.

Now all this might seem but a solid, well-organized labor for the establishment of simple, Christian community life, and in no way a remarkable feat for one of Fray Junípero's gifts. But it *was* remarkable on two counts. First, it was undertaken in the Sierra Gorda, that fearsome no-man's-land for Christians. And secondly, it was labor so well done that its benefits endured long after its director was recalled to the capital after less than nine years among the Pames. Moreover, after the first year, Fray Junípero had been named Father President of the Sierra Gorda missions and it must be supposed that this required his occasional absences from Xalpan in the interest of the other stations. Even so, his flock was left in such fine condition there in the midst of its naturally arid, unfertile desert habitat that, to quote his successor, it was found to be "well housed, well fed, docile and devout." As for Fray Junípero himself, these years had been a most profitable rehearsal for the great drama which would form the central theme of his life.

But once more his patience was to be taxed by a long delay before he might resume the role he preferred above all others in the American theatre. The cause was the same as before. He was too talented, too versatile. As in Mallorca, the Franciscans in San Fernando could not bring themselves to part with his services at the home monastery. After all, where could sermons as dramatic and forceful as Fray Junípero's be more badly needed than in the gay and careless Mexican capital and in other cities of the land?

So now, during another nine years, he obeyed orders that largely tied him to the México of the colonists, although he didn't relish it. Rather, he accepted it as his special cross, to which he added continuous and rigorous penances "for the sins

of the people." He still believed that the offenses offered God by the *elegantes* were more reprehensible than the uncomplicated brutish sins of the aborigines. Nor did he mind saying so! Though he was noted for his gentleness toward his brother religious, and afterward to the Indians, never would he "play down" his denunciatory sermons or try to make things easy for the socialites who flocked in ever greater numbers to hear him castigate their worldliness. Never was he beguiled by their flattering attentions, nor would he permit himself to be drawn into their comfortable circles. With his social equals, he simply could *not* be the "diplomatic, good-fellow sort of Father."

According to modern ideas, all this should have guaranteed his unpopularity. On the contrary, the more he scolded the vain and bumptious colonists, the more popular he became, until finally he was recognized as the most esteemed figure in the capital he esteemed so little! The Spanish Mexicans might be sinners, but they didn't resent being told they were, as so many races are prone to do. At the least, they were *believers* and they had confidence in the holy priest who had the courage to "tell them off." It would never have occurred to them to dispute his judgment, for they knew he was right. They were, perhaps, like naughty children who, when faced with their guilt, do not question the reproof of beloved parents. As a child's security lies in his parents, their security lay in Padre Junípero, or at least in what he stood for. And so they could not bear to let him go from them to waste his intellectual gifts on savages who could hardly be expected to appreciate them! But that is what they finally *had* to bear.

* * *

With the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 had come a royal order transferring the missions of Baja California to the

Franciscans. The new charge was not likely to be the easiest job in the world, for, although the Jesuits had warned their neophytes to remain quietly where they were and await the new missionaries, the Indians' fear of army rule had sent them scurrying into the hills. In any case, Junípero Serra was delighted with his appointment as Father President of the Baja California mission chain. He and his friars, again including Father Palóu, disembarked at Loreto on Good Friday, April 1, 1768.

While he was busying himself with the reorganization of the peninsula foundations, the Mexican government suddenly discovered reason for a new interest in Alta California. This was that the Russians, who already enjoyed a strong fur trade with Alaska, had now begun to prowl the California waters with the idea, it was to be supposed, of colonization. It seemed that if Spain wished to hold her full territorial rights in America, she would have to take steps in a northerly direction to protect her interests. On this point the Viceroy, Carlos Francisco de Croix, and the King's *Visitador*,* Don José de Gálvez, were in complete accord. They recommended to Spain an immediate serious colonization and fortification of Alta California, which under Spanish custom and duty would, of course, be tempered by the participation of the religious.

The King responded with authorization for this to be done as speedily as possible, charging Gálvez with the supervision of all arrangements and specifying that both the Bay of San Diego and of Monterey be fortified and provided with colonies. The conversion of the Indians must be a main objective of the "Sacred Expedition." Inasmuch as the *Visitador* had recently made an inspection of the Franciscan work in Baja California, it was natural that he should choose the ardent Fray Junípero to head the religious arm. He was named Father President for

*Inspector-General.

Alta as well as Baja California. Here at last was a cause made to order for the heart, character and soul of Junípero Serra. In perfect harmony with Gálvez' ideas, he fell feverishly to work in preparation for launching the Great Adventure of his life — the foundation of the rich country we know as California.

Beyond the old reports on the harbors of San Diego and Monterey and the Santa Barbara Channel region, very little was known of the land into which the expedition would be heading. It is said that when Fray Junípero was conferring with Gálvez about the missions to be built at these three spots, he asked pensively: "Is there to be no mission for our Father St. Francis?" To this, Gálvez replied wittily: "If St. Francis wants a mission, let him cause his port to be discovered."* The *Visitador* could not foresee how future events were to improve on his little irony!

The expedition would set out in four divisions, two by sea and two by land, to meet again at San Diego. Each party would be composed of artisans, farmers, soldiers and friars, together with their horses, mules, other domestic livestock and provisions. Some indispensable items, including church bells and altar furnishings, as well as mules, actually had to be "lifted" from the peninsula missions. This was regrettable, but Fray Junípero knew it couldn't be helped: once arrived in the north, the missionaries would have put months of travel between their needs and the cities where such things might be had. And at the moment time was short enough for the much that demanded doing.

As soon as the two ships (the *San Carlos* and the *San Antonio*) were loaded and ready for sailing, they and their standards were blessed. Gálvez, unable to go along, made a little speech, and the cannon roared. Fray Junípero sang the

*Francisco Palóu, *Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Junípero Serra*, translated by C. Scott Williams (Pasadena, Calif., 1913), p. 85.

farewell Mass on each boat, only a few days apart, and they were off for California! It was February, 1769. In March, the first land party pulled out under the command of Captain Rivera y Moncada. That of Gaspar de Portolá would not get away until two months later. With it, after seeing to everything and attending everyone, would go the overworked, middle-aged, lame and jubilant Padre Serra!

Portolá's delay may have been partly due to the fact that he had commenced to worry about his responsibility to get the crippled old priest all that long way to San Diego. The condition of Serra's ulcerated leg was quite shocking, and if it should grow too bad even for mule-riding, what was to be done? Carrying him in a litter would seriously handicap their progress. Fray Junípero had gone to Misión San Xavier, Palóu's station, to bid his old friend good-bye, for this journey they could not share. So concerned was Padre Palóu over Fray Junípero's condition that he wrote to Gálvez, suggesting himself as a substitute for the Father President. But neither Serra nor the *Visitador* would entertain any such idea. For the Franciscan, this was at last the chance to do in God's service what he had spent a lifetime hoping and waiting for; and as for Gálvez, he was depending upon the qualities he had recognized in Junípero Serra to guarantee the success of the costly undertaking he had so highly recommended to his King.

Portolá, for all his misgivings, could hardly oppose both Serra and Gálvez, and presently it was seen that God was surely on their side. Fray Junípero had bidden Juan Coronel, their muleteer, to doctor his leg with one of the suet and herb poultices he was accustomed to apply to his galled pack animals. Almost overnight this unorthodox treatment so relieved the pain and swelling of the ulcer that Serra was enabled to ride in comparative comfort! Since he would make several stops at the old missions, he arranged to meet Portolá at the most northerly of these, Santa María de los Angeles. From

San Xavier, where the missionaries supplied him with clothing and whatever comforts they could offer against the rigors of the weary trip ahead, he proceeded on to San José de Comandú, Purísima and Guadalupe. At the latter he spent some days and was given a fifteen-year-old Indian lad for an acolyte. There were four more stops before he arrived on May 5 at Santa María de los Angeles, where he joined the Portolá party as planned. They all departed together for Velicatá, where they halted long enough to found a mission that Fray Junípero believed might prove a valuable link between the stations of the two Californias and where he left Father Miguel de la Campa, with a full share of mission stores, two soldiers as guards, and a prayer that the neighboring pagans might soon be attracted to the poor little establishment and so to the rich and wondrous Faith.

It was just above Velicatá that Fray Junípero was dismayed to run across the first totally unclad Indians he had ever seen. In his own words: "I saw something I could not believe when I . . . had been told about it. It was this: they were entirely naked, as Adam in the Garden, before sin. . . . Not for one moment could you notice the least sign of shame in them for their lack of dress."* The Indians he referred to were the ten men and two boys whose timid approach to the strange caravan was rewarded by gifts of dried figs and raisins, which they devoured gluttonously on the spot. In reciprocation they offered fish which proved, however, too rotten and evil-smelling to attract the travelers from México. It was a great relief to Fray Junípero that the Indian women they encountered later did not, as the men, go unclothed. He had dreaded that prospect.

This incident and many others — pleasant, near-tragic and quaint — were noted in the Father President's carefully kept

*Serra, *Diary*, under entry of May 15, 1769. Translated by Maximin Piette, O. F. M., and used through the courtesy of the Academy of American Franciscan History, Washington, D. C.

diary of the journey. One item mentions a cook who "murdered" a burro for no other reason than his bad temper and who was penalized by Portolá, being ordered to pay three times the burro's value, and walk the remainder of the route to San Diego. The abundance or lack of water as the party toiled along day after day inspired some of the comments noted in the diary, as did the scenery, which grew more and more lovely with their advance; the animals they saw — deer, rabbits and the "lions," whose screams cut the night air; the flowers whose beauty reached a climax in the Castilian rose.

Most of all, however, the diary was given over to descriptions of the childlike natives of the kind with whom Serra was destined to live the rest of his life. They would be his "children" — his pupils and friends; and he observed them carefully. "Their fine stature, deportment, conversation and gaiety won the hearts of all of us. They loaded us down with fish and oysters . . . ; they put on their dances for our benefit. . . . The mules alone excited their astonishment and a considerable amount of fear."*

Other Indians whom they met, however, had no fear of the mules, finding to their delight that they could frighten the poor beasts into a stampede by rushing at them howling. This "joke" they carried so far as to become an intolerable nuisance, which had to be sternly discouraged. Finally the soldiers discharged muskets into the air which, harmless means though it was, terrified and entirely subdued the pranksters. Fray Junípero regretted this solution to the problem, writing: "That did the trick. But I had my misgivings that by such a display we might leave in their minds some doubt as to our good will towards them."** If, as he thought, these Indians were affectionate creatures and merely mischievous, there was still not much dignity in them. They were the most shameless

**Ibid.*, entry of June 23.

***Ibid.*, entry of May 29.

beggars, coveting and clamoring for everything they saw, including his own habit though, as he well knew, this was certainly from no concern over their nudity. One day they ran off with his spectacles. "God alone knows what it cost me to recover them. . . . At last, after no end of trouble, I got them back after they had gone through the hands of the women and of everyone who wanted them."*

Anyone who knows the rough terrain of Baja California can well imagine what it must have been like at this time and how troublesome the journey certainly was for these pioneers. Through May and June they toiled ahead under the blazing summer sun of California. Surely they must be drawing near San Diego! This hope was fortified when they spotted two natives covered by garments of blue cotton. This was the cloth Gálvez had loaded on the ships at Loreto in order that no subjects of the King of Spain should be seen wandering about unclad. This should mean that their friends were nearby. The Indians confirmed this, saying that two more easy days' march would bring them to San Diego, where the others were already encamped. The weary men mustered the enthusiasm to goad their even wearier horses forward and, on July 1, were rewarded by the sight of the Spanish flag fluttering from the masts of the *San Carlos* and the *San Antonio* against the blue waters of San Diego Bay!

They had indeed arrived at last, as had the three divisions before them; but it was a sad reunion after all. The camp was full of sickness and death. The *San Antonio* had made a fair voyage and had dropped anchor on April 11 in San Diego harbor, where, according to orders, Captain Juan Pérez, another Mallorcan, prepared to await the sister ship before sailing further north. But the *San Carlos* had not sailed into view until

**Ibid.*, entry of June 27.

nearly three weeks later. Even then, it failed to fire a salute. Nor did any of the passengers or crew make a landing! This was strange, and Pérez, alarmed, rowed out to investigate. There he found a terrible situation. The *San Carlos'* crew, from captain to lowliest seaman, were down with scurvy. There had been no sailors with sufficient strength to lower a boat for a landing.

The ill-fated *San Carlos* had been blown far off her course, and her food supply had been exhausted. The water casks had developed leaks; and there had been nothing with which to fight the plague when it had struck. Many had died at sea. The captain of the *San Antonio* had thereafter got the survivors ashore and built shelters for the sick. However, deaths had continued, the ill infecting Pérez' own crew, and matters had been worse than tragic until the arrival of Captain Rivera with the first land party. Determined to save his own people at least, Rivera had immediately separated the camps and imposed a military enforcement of all sanitary precautions then known, while doing what was possible for the afflicted. Such was the unhappy story of the earlier arrivals, and although things had begun to improve before Portolá and Fray Junípero led their forces into camp, they saw in consternation how the colonists' ranks had been reduced.

To make matters worse, an awaited supply ship, the *San José*, had failed to put in an appearance with fresh stores for the little settlement. Though they could not know it, the *San José* would *never* come, nor would anyone ever learn her fate.

As there were not enough able-bodied sailors left to man the two boats for the northern advance, it was clear that a land party would have to go instead. Several conferences of the leaders resulted in the decision to send the *San Antonio* back to San Blas for a new crew and supplies. Father Serra would remain with the convalescents at San Diego to found the first mission, while the rest, under Portolá's command and

including Captain Rivera, Sergeant José Ortega of the fourth division, and Father Juan Crespi, would start north to locate the much-discussed harbor of Monterey. All these plans Fray Junípero related to Father Palóu by letter: "It is a good country, very much different from that of Old California. . . . There are immense numbers of native pagans, and . . . they are very affable. . . . They treat us as if they had known us all their lives. . . . All the men go about naked, but the women and girls are modestly dressed. . . . The land expedition [will go] on from here . . . in three or four days. . . . The mission has not yet been established, but I am going to see to it soon. . . . My friend, I had got this far when the captain came to me to say that he could not wait any longer. . . . Your affectionate brother and servant, Junípero Serra."*

On July 16, Serra was able to raise the cross for the foundation of Misión San Diego de Alcalá. The bell was hung from the branch of a tree, and after Mass work began on a rude little church. Unhappily, when it came to an interest in the Faith, the Diegüenos were far less amenable than Fray Junípero had at first thought and had therefore stated in his letter to Father Palóu. He was bitterly disappointed that the first Indian babe brought in for baptism was lost to God when its panic-stricken father snatched it from his arms just as he was about to administer the Sacrament. Father and infant speedily disappeared and were never recovered. For years Fray Serra bemoaned the fate of the little one.

But there was much to do and he couldn't afford to feel discouraged or depressed. He was building for the Faith in a fresh, new, beautiful land. Usually it was also peaceful, though not always. After the departure of Portolá there had been one sharp skirmish with the Diegüenos, whose "amiability" was no match for their overmastering cupidity. They

*Palou, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76.

stole on principle and even carried off the sails and rigging of the *San Carlos* before climaxing their abuses in an outright raid on the camp itself. Outnumbering the able-bodied colonists ten to one, the Indians plundered the huts, carrying off all the utensils they could lay hands on and even robbing the bed-ridden of their sheets and blankets. Until the soldiers' guns put them to flight, they tried to protect their loot by a discharge of arrows and javelins, which had seriously wounded the blacksmith and a *fraile* and killed a boy servant. However, with no seeming ill will, they returned to San Diego in a few days as friendly as ever, trustfully bringing in their own injured for treatment by the Spaniards. Serra counseled that this Christian service be given them, and the surgeon extracted the bullets and bound up the Indians' wounds. Nothing further was said of the affair on either side; and one of the pagan boys remained in the camp with Fray Junípero, who taught him Spanish so that in time he became a valuable interpreter. It remained for the future to prove to the kindly missionary that the San Diego Indians were by all counts the worst he would ever have to encounter in California.

Being so occupied, Fray Junípero didn't take much notice of Portolá's long absence, but when the Commander finally did return it was most disturbing to see him accompanied by the entire expedition, most of which the Father President had believed was now established at Monterey. Something must be seriously amiss! The explanation was the most bitter disappointment the pioneers had yet met and very difficult to understand. It was simply that the Monterey searching party had been unable to *find* the famed and well-mapped bay, although they had sought it diligently! Even today historians find themselves puzzled by this point because two of Portolá's soldiers *did* actually sight "the great inland sea" which we know now as the Bay of San Francisco and which lies well to the north of Monterey. The only possible deduction is that the party *did* see

but *failed to recognize* the harbor even as they stood upon its shores. Perhaps they depended too much on finding Vizcaíno's cross, but such an expectation seems a bit absurd in view of the more than one hundred and sixty years that had passed since the raising. For it might easily have been destroyed, either by the elements or the pagans. Vizcaíno had fully described other landmarks, the famous oak as well as the little stream of sweet water, but they were somehow overlooked by the searchers. Anyway, as their provisions began to run low, Portolá admitted defeat and conducted the exploring party back to San Diego, considering this to be the only course he could take.

Padre Serra found it hard to concur in this opinion. He was personally convinced of the accuracy of Vizcaíno's maps, which set forth the exact latitude of Monterey; and his recommendation was that they make a new try at once. Gálvez had definitely ordered them to found missions *at San Diego and Monterey* in order to secure Spain's claim to California. What possible excuse could they advance for such a foolish failure? But Portolá was deeply discouraged and felt that they should use the slim provisions at San Diego to see them safely home to México. He, too, found it hard to abandon the great venture, but he had the welfare of his men to consider and this was his best judgment. He placed little confidence in the return of the *San Antonio* with the necessary relief. The ship might have been held up by Gálvez; or perhaps it had met the fate of the *San José*. No, he couldn't gamble the lives of his men on anything so uncertain as the possible appearance of the *San Antonio* after eight long months!

This was the worst moment in Junípero Serra's life. He simply couldn't conceive of accepting defeat now, abandoning all these Indians whose welfare had already cost them so much effort and hardship. He had come to California to save them for God. Very well, he would depend on Him to see the holy adventure through! First, though, he used all the arguments at

his command. If this expedition was to come to nothing but a huge waste of money and life, could they expect Spain to send out another? Hardly, and certainly not in time. The result would mean the loss of California to more enterprising nations, and this loss would also be the Church's loss. He even went so far as to declare that if their Commander ordered the colonists to move south, he and Father Crespi would remain behind!

In the end, Portolá compromised. Rivera was dispatched to Velicatá with twenty soldiers and a pack train, but he and the others would delay nine days to give Father Serra time to make a novena for the arrival of the *San Antonio*. To all practical appearances, this ship was their one hope at the moment and, in Portolá's opinion, a decidedly slim one. The two *frailes* might refuse to go if they chose, but what could they accomplish without supplies and the help of at least a few colonists? Nothing but their own futile deaths. So they commenced the novena which was to end on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph. Their pleas would be directed to this saint.

One can imagine the suspense of those nine days for the whole party but particularly for Father Serra! One after another they dawned, each dragging on into relentless night, increasing the tension. On the nineteenth of March, Fray Junípero exhausted himself in prayer. By sheer force, he held to his hope all the long day while that of the others must have waned distressfully. Into the dusk, the lame, aging Franciscan persisted in his lookout toward sea. And then, just before the light faded completely, he had his reward. Out there on the ocean before his eyes, a ship had suddenly appeared!

At daybreak, it was gone again; and the camp at San Diego knew the blackest despair—with the single exception of Fray Junípero. He was calmly certain that the boat sighted *had been* the *San Antonio*. His explanation? It had simply

failed to recognize the landmarks. But it would return. How could he be so confident? It was impossible that St. Joseph would have gone so far as to grant them a glimpse of the ship on his *very* day, only to taunt them in their misery! Though Fray Junípero's answer satisfied him, it is unlikely that it did much to cheer his companions.

Four more days wore on, but the *San Antonio*, if it *had* been the *San Antonio*, failed to break the blue expanse before them. It was a bitter period for the would-be colonists who were already existing on a few *tortillas* a day. But with the fifth morning, the light broke on hope! Back toward San Diego from the north rode the *San Antonio*, bringing deliverance to the expedition and to the great cause of California. Slipping smoothly into the harbor, she fired a salute, which was returned by the *San Carlos*. Sailors, soldiers and artisans swarmed ashore to explain the four days. They had not been lost at all, but simply following Gálvez' orders to proceed directly to Monterey. Confident that the northern colony was already fact, he had judged that it probably stood in greater need of supplies and reinforcement than the longer established San Diego. The *San Antonio* had gone as far as Point Concepción when the failure of its water supply had caused Captain Pérez to put in for new stores. There the Indians had related the story of Portolá's failure to locate Monterey, insisting that there were now no white men to the north. Pérez had decided that in such case he was justified in disobeying orders and had put about for a return run to San Diego. He brought provisions in plenty and letters from the *Visitador* and the Viceroy. Their contents left Portolá no choice of action. His superiors were expecting success at Monterey as well as at San Diego. It was now up to him to redeem himself!

A new northern expedition was organized immediately. Portolá would set off once more by land and the *San Antonio* would parallel his route by sea. Fray Junípero would go along

this time, on the *San Antonio*. His jubilant letter to Father Palóu reported: "Yesterday, very late in the evening, I received notice from the Captain . . . that we must embark that very night. . . . Fr. Parron and Fr. Gómez stay in San Diego. . . . Fr. Crespi and I go, with the intention of separating, one for Monterey, and the other for San Buenaventura."* The letter continued with a plea for ecclesiastical news. He longed to know the identity and the Pontifical name of the new Pope; and of the progress of the canonization proceedings of Blessed Joseph of Cupertino. He also begged for altar candles, and closed his letter saying that he was now sailing out of the harbor and that one of the San Carlos' launches would take the letter ashore, where it would be given to the couriers who were to leave San Diego at once. This message bore the date April 16, 1770.

The engineless sailing boats of the eighteenth century were exposed to the whims of nature, and the *San Antonio's* tardy arrival at Monterey must be blamed on unfavorable winds which had first blown her as far south as a point opposite San Borja in Baja California and had afterward driven her farther north than the site of the future San Francisco. The short voyage took her six and a half weeks. And, meanwhile, Portolá the doubter, rather than Fray Junípero the believer, had managed to find Monterey Bay. One may imagine his feelings when it was identified as the exact spot where he had raised three crosses of his own on the earlier trip!

On May 31 Fray Junípero came ashore. There he raised an altar before which the whole settlement gathered to sing the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* and the *Te Deum*. The founding Father then sang Mass, and Portolá took possession of Monterey in the name of the Spanish King. Thereafter, leaving Fray Junípero to establish Alta California's second mission, San

*Palóu, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

Carlos Borroméo, Portolá sailed south on the *San Antonio* to reap the rewards of a great charge successfully completed. In August he would stand by Gálvez' side in the Mexican capital, while all the church bells of the city pealed in thanksgiving and flags waved triumphantly, to share the honors ever accorded Spanish heroism! The humble but tenacious friar whose purpose and prayer had made such acclaim possible for both, would not, of course, be there to receive any honors on his own account. Nor would he have wished to be. For him, a great charge had *not* been successfully completed, merely begun. But with such a beginning, he also had come into his own. Alta California had been saved for Spain and for the Church! Now missions could rise, one after another, to the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. Meanwhile Fray Junípero toiled away by the lovely, lonely bay which had once hidden its face from an able company of professional military men, but which could not elude the faith of his Franciscan heart!

He soon decided to move San Carlos some three miles to the south, nearer the center of the native population and farther from the soldiers, whose poor deportment did much to nullify the moral teachings of the missionaries. It was inadvisable to locate the missions too far from military protection, but as time went on Fray Junípero knew much exasperation at the antics of the bored, and therefore frequently abusive, troops. Besides, he had lost his heart to the Carmel Valley, where he could envision a lovely new Misión San Carlos rising against the piercing blue of the sea. An abundance of water and wide cultivable fields also argued in favor of the move. First, however, he must study his whole future program.

He had taken note of Portolá's comments on an especially fruitful country lying in the shadow of the Santa Lucía Mountains, to the south some twenty-five leagues. The Commander had crossed and recrossed this section in his treks between San Diego and Monterey. It was an oak-studded region, charming

to behold, and its natives had seemed hospitable. After another arrival of the *San Antonio* with ten new friars from the College of San Fernando, and after preliminary work had commenced at Carmel, Fray Junípero set out for the Santa Lucía Valley with two *frailes* and some soldiers. Arriving there in July, 1771, he hung the bell from an oak bough, as was his invariable custom, and then he promptly seized the rope, pulling it so energetically that its loud clanging filled the countryside.

"Why do you weary yourself unnecessarily," one of the friars wished to know, "as this is not the place where the church is to stand, nor is there anywhere within hearing . . . a single pagan soul?"

"In this way, let me give expansion to my heart," answered the Father President. "... I trust in God and in the favor of San Antonio that this mission will come to be a great settlement of many Christians."* And so in time it was.

His next step was the actual transference of his attention to the gracious spot he had chosen for San Carlos at Carmel, which for the rest of his life would be "home" to him. To Carmel he would always return from his frequent and fatiguing journeys, the trips he would gladly undergo for the establishment of new missions or in the interests of their welfare. There, too, he would die, but before that a full chapter of Franciscan history would be written in California. This determined, self-denying, ill and aging man would not be called to God until six more great missions had risen in addition to the humble beginnings at San Diego, San Carlos and San Antonio. By that time, too, he would have secured legal protection and prosperity for these missions and the many others that were to come into being after he was no longer alive. He thanked God for the better spirit of the Indians at Carmel. After the rebuffs at the southern station, it was good to see

*Paláu, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

these "children" following him about docilely, taking immense interest in all that he did, said and desired. And by 1773, San Carlos would be able to claim one hundred and sixty-five of the two hundred and ninety-one baptisms to have been administered by the Franciscans in California.

But now, while he was still laboring to build Carmel, which would not be ready for the formal dedication until Christmas Eve, he sought to save time by dispatching Fathers Somera and Cambón to raise the cross and erect Misión San Gabríel Arcangel a few miles from the present site of Los Angeles.

Pedro Fages had replaced Portolá as California's civil authority, and the substitution had been most unfavorable to the Franciscans and to the missions. The *Comandante* failed to see eye to eye with the Father President on many vital matters and soon became a real stumbling block to the work. He was abnormally jealous of Serra's privileges and capable of pettily holding up supplies and even mail when it suited his whim or seemed likely to make a show of his superior power. He judged that his should be the deciding voice on how the whole California colonizing program was to be run, and this despite the fact that he had come on the original expedition in a comparatively undistinguished position.

Fray Junípero, who had already given evidence of his rare administrative ability and who had always been uncompromising when knowing himself in the right, showed an amazing forbearance in his dealings with Fages. When the Commander had interfered with plans for the founding of a mission at San Buenaventura, intercepted the friars' long-awaited letters, when he had refused to discipline his soldiers for their offenses against the Indians, Father Serra had remained calm. Now, however, it was plain that something would have to be done about the stubborn opposition of the official. Revolving these things in his mind, the Father President determined to join Fages' overland trip to the south scheduled for

departure during late August, 1772. It might be well to get closer to the seat of authority in México; and meanwhile he could check the new mission at San Gabríel. En route he founded Misión San Luís Obispo de Tolosa in the pleasant Valley of the Bears. Then, leaving friars in charge of San Luís Obispo, he continued on to San Gabríel and finally arrived at San Diego.

His joy was great that Father Palóu had been able to come to meet him there, and the two friends enjoyed a gladsome reunion. How much there was to talk about! It had been nearly three and a half years that these brothers in religion had been separated after their long labors shoulder to shoulder in México. Meanwhile their old patrons, Don José de Gálvez and Viceroy de Croix, had been transferred, and México was now ruled by Antonio María Bucareli, whom they did not know. The new Viceroy was reputed to be a just and indeed a very great man. His efficiency was much praised, and this he was now devoting to New Spain's chronically disordered finances. One of the current rumors was that, among other economies, the port of San Blas was about to be closed. If this were true, it would work a great hardship on the missions and colonists of California. But perhaps His Excellency did not have first-hand information on their needs and problems. If San Blas were to be closed it would mean that all supplies for the province would have to be shipped overland by mule train. Father Serra knew from experience, and bitter experience, that this much slower method greatly increased the danger of damage or loss of the goods. Pack trains were exposed to all sorts of unforeseeable accidents and delays, during which food-stuffs intended for the Californians might be consumed along the route. He was determined to save San Blas if he could. Ships were expensive to build but in the end not more so than overland portage when one considered the losses in cargo and time. And he still had the problem of Fages to settle.

Since it seemed that Bucareli was a reasonable man, Fray Junípero decided to go to México City to speak with him personally. He therefore sailed on the *San Carlos* on October 20 for San Blas. There, he saw a partly finished transport in the docks. He took time to inspect her deck and hold, and then bade the shipmaster hurry construction as much as possible, for he wished to return on this fine craft when ready to re-embark for California. To the man's protest that no more sailings for San Diego or Monterey were to leave from San Blas, Father Serra merely shook his head. This vital point was one of the matters he had left his beloved missions to settle.

He had to overcome two nearly fatal illnesses between the port and the capital, but finally he presented himself at the door of San Fernando in February, 1773. He was received promptly and with courteous attention by Antonio Bucareli, who was, perhaps, quite interested to see this old Franciscan titan who had been making history by his service to Spain on the frontiers of the Empire. The Viceroy was a keen judge of men and he realized at once that the Father President knew his subject thoroughly. He requested that Fray Junípero prepare a detailed *representación* setting forth his needs, complaints and suggestions; assuring him of his own intention to do everything possible to sustain and advance the mission work.

In the end, most of Father Serra's requests were granted. San Blas would not be closed and a supervisor would be appointed to see that California-bound goods would be properly packed to prevent damage on the high seas. Fages would be removed, but he would not be replaced by the able Sergeant José Ortega, as recommended by Fray Junípero, who had offered as his reasons for making this strong suggestion: "I have observed that he is sensible, thoughtful and strict, without being irritable. I believe that the men will like him though they will fear him and that they will fear him as much as is needful without having reason for dislike." Though the Im-

perial authority could not bring himself to advance a sergeant to the rank of *comandante*, he did reward Ortega for his many services to the Crown. Captain Rivera y Moncada would go to California to take Fages' place. There were many other concessions, and Father Serra, elated by a success that would guarantee a full development for his lifework, was able to embark for San Diego on the *Santiago*, precisely the ship that he had seen in the docks and stated he wished to have carry him back to California. The masterbuilder, recalling this earlier conversation, could only react with amazement: "We laughed at you then, Father . . . as everyone was saying that the port was to be abandoned. But now we see your prophecy fulfilled."

But the Father President only smiled and said: "It was the intense desire of seeing a large vessel employed . . . which would hold a goodly supply of provisions for my poor people . . . which led me to pronounce this wish. But now that God has granted our desire, let us thank Him for it."*

Another joy was in store for Fray Junípero. Owing to the transfer of the Baja California missions to the Dominican Order so that the Franciscans' whole force might be freed for Alta California, Father Palóu had been given a choice of returning to San Fernando or joining his friend in Monterey. He had unhesitatingly taken his stand by Fray Junípero.

Truly, the good days could now begin for the missions, though one great tragedy was in store for the first Father President. This was the Indian uprising that burned San Diego to the ground in 1775 and in which he lost the good Father Jayme, who had bravely gone out to face the rebels with the customary "Love God, my children." To the intense grief of all, Father Jayme was hacked to death for this loving gesture. However, Fray Junípero, hearing the news at distant Carmel,

*Palóu, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

was able to take increased hope in the fact that the soil of California had been watered by the blood of a martyr. And indeed it did seem to bring a revival of spiritual activity at San Diego. Very soon a new mission was rising there under Serra's personal supervision, and it could be boasted that now there were seven hundred and forty Indian neophytes who had been won at this place.

While Fray Junípero was thus busying himself at San Diego, Father Palóu helped to explore the area about the magnificent bay that St. Francis had indeed "shown them," and on a favorable site he founded Misión San Francisco. Perhaps in answer to Gálvez' challenge, this Bay of San Francisco proved to be and remains the most dramatic of California's wonders. The seventh mission was San Juan Capistrano, which Fray Junípero established on his way home from the rebuilding of San Diego, in a charming valley by the sea about halfway between that point and San Gabriél.

The missions were on the march now! Santa Clara de Asís came next, in January, 1777, though the desperately busy Father President was not able to see it until September, after which he also paid a visit to San Francisco and gazed for the first time on the "great inland sea" that had been granted them by his Father St. Francis! All the older stations were now secured though some would always be more prosperous than others. They were the centers of a teeming agricultural and industrial life. Farming, animal husbandry, weaving, pottery, brick and tile-making — all these occupations had been taught to the Indians along with catechism, music, Spanish and, to the abler, reading. Under the watchful supervision of the friars, the natives were planting and reaping, building their first orderly dwellings, clothing their formerly naked bodies and developing a taste for properly cooked foods. The Franciscans were succeeding in a unique undertaking — the civilized colonization of a new land with its own aborigines.

As there was no Bishop in California and probably would not be for many years, the Father President was authorized to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation in 1778. This privilege was the cause of his almost uninterrupted travel from this date to the end of his life. But though he was constantly traveling from mission to mission, he need have no worry for San Carlos. Father Crespi was there, and Father Palóu. It was on one of these Confirmation trips covering the full length of Fray Junípero's "Rosary of Missions" that he was at last able to found San Buenaventura. Planned as the third station, it was actually the ninth; its altar furnishings had lain in their unopened cases for thirteen long years. San Buenaventura was the last mission to be opened before the death of the great Father Serra. He dedicated it on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782. It must have brought him supreme joy after so many obstacles to see this particular mission come into being there beside the sea on the site that he had long declared to be the most favorable of them all! He had planned San Buenaventura with Gálvez even before his departure from Loreto.

Only Father Serra knew the depths of his love for California and for his happy, careless, but now slowly improving, "children." Only he could know the toll that the prodigious effort to make his dream of their salvation come true had exacted of his always frail and pain-racked body. And only he understood that now the end was approaching. But he was content. He had striven against insuperable obstacles in the wilderness to plant the seed of faith in the souls of men. His subjects could hardly have been worse; his results could scarcely have been better. His nine missions would be the forerunners of many more. Attended by his lifelong friend, Father Palóu, he quietly died, without a word of regret, on August 28, 1784. Grief-stricken Indians covered his tomb with wild flowers and lovingly pleaded for bits of anything that he had touched.

Services for the humble priest who had created California lasted for days.

* * *

There is a tender legend told of Father Serra's earlier missionary days in México. It avows that one day while he and one of his Franciscan brothers were crossing a particularly abandoned desert land they rejoiced to see a small adobe dwelling shaded by three cottonwood trees. An ass was tethered to one of these. Night was approaching and it was indeed a blessing that they were received in this home, offered refreshment and invited to pass the night. The generous family residing there consisted of a kindly elderly husband, a lovely young wife and a winsome fair-haired boy who, without making a sound, sat on the floor playing with a tiny lamb. Fray Junípero felt himself irresistibly attracted to the lovable child, and upon retiring he gave the little one his blessing. At this, the boy raised his small hand and made the sign of the cross.

In the morning, the Franciscans resumed their journey, and upon reaching their destination they recounted their experience, only to be informed that there was not in all that desolate region a dwelling place of any kind. To prove his story and hoping to see the lovely child again, Fray Junípero returned to the spot with several brothers and some muleteers. They found the cottonwoods, the only trees for miles, but it was true that there was no house. Happy tears coursed down his face as Fray Junípero knelt to give thanks that he had been blessed with a vision of the Holy Family and had been sheltered by them.

If this is how it had been, we should not wonder too much at the amazing confidence with which he moved and labored during the rest of his life, that holy confidence which was never to admit an impossibility in his long work for God and for his Father St. Francis.

GLOSSARY

of Spanish and Nahuatl Terms

- arriero** — mule-train driver
barranca — small canyon, arroyo, cliff or precipice
barrio — parish or district of a city
Beato — Blessed, one who has been beatified
Cabecera — Talamanca Indian of Cabec
camino — road, highway
capa — vestment
Capitalinos — residents of the capital
cárcel — jail, prison
cargador — porter
carreta — ox-cart, wagon
casa — house
casita — small house
colonia — colony, residence district
comandante — commander
como — how, like, as
cómo no? — why not?
conde — count, title of nobility
cordón — cord
corista — chorister
descalzos — those who go barefoot
Diegüño — San Diego Indian
doctrina — doctrine
don — title for addressing or referring to gentleman of upper class
doña — title for addressing or referring to lady of upper class
el — (masculine article) the; **él** — he
El Convento de la Corona de Cristo — the Monastery of the Crown of Christ
El Divino Salvador — the Divine Saviour
elegante — elegant, member of upper class
El Sacromonte — the Sacred Mountain
familias — families or family dwellings
familias rústicas — rustic dwellings
fraile — friar
Fray — title of friar used in address

- gente — people
gracias — thanks
hacendado — owner of a hacienda
hacienda — large estate for agriculture or animal husbandry
hermano — brother
hija — daughter
hijita — little daughter
hijito — little son
hijo — son
Ilustrísimo — Bishop or Archbishop (title of address), illustrious
juez — judge
la — (feminine article) the, she
La Plaza de las Armas — the Park of the Arms
loco — crazy, insane
maestro — teacher, master of learning or profession or trade
mestizo — one of mixed Indian and European ancestry
mi, mía, mío — (possessive pronoun) my, mine
mil — thousand
mil gracias — a thousand thanks
milpa — cornfield
mozo — servant, young man
muchacha — girl
muchacho — boy
muy bien — very well
Nahuatl — basic race from which Aztecs sprung, used also to designate the languages of descendant races.
Nuestra Señora de la Concepción — Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception
oidor — judge
oratorio — oratory
palenque — palisade, term used to designate ancient palisade tribal towns and their inhabitants
peón — Indian peasant
petate — straw mat used by Indians for sleeping on ground or floor
Poblanos — residents of city of Puebla
pobre — poor
puente — bridge
pues — because, for, since, then
Queretareño — resident of city of Querétaro

- Real Audiencia** — Royal Court, court of highest authority in Spain's colonies
representación — statement, representation
rico — rich, a rich person
sala — parlor, drawing room
Salve María — Hail Mary
Santiagüño — resident of Santiago de los Caballeros
santo (also **San**) — saint
señor — Mr., gentleman
señora — Mrs., lady
sí — yes
tambor — drum
tameme — porter, Aztec carrier (*Nahuatl*)
temblor — earthquake
tilma — cloak, mantle
tortilla — Indian staple food of corn made into thin cakes
vámanos — let us go
Venerable — a title applied to one whose Cause for beatification and canonization in the Church has reached the state where heroic virtue or martyrdom has been approved
venerado — venerated
Veracruzano — resident of Veracruz
Visitador — King's Inspector General
zócolo — central plaza (*Nahuatl*)



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general route of
Fray Margil's journeys.

..... Suggests
Serra's general route.

- [1] Ancient Tenochtitlán — Zumárraga's see city. [2] Location of Gante's first life. [3] Scene of Pedro de Betancourt's labors. [4] Home of the Boy Martyr hospital community. [5] Serra's first New-World mission. [6] [Inset map:] F

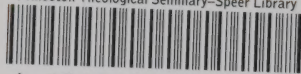


ool. [3] City founded by Motolinía — Scene of Blessed Sebastián's religious
 [5] Scene of martyrdom of the Boy Martyrs. [7] Quiroga's (second) Santa Fé
 of departure of expeditions into Alta California. [10] Serra's home mission.

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